

THE LONDON READER

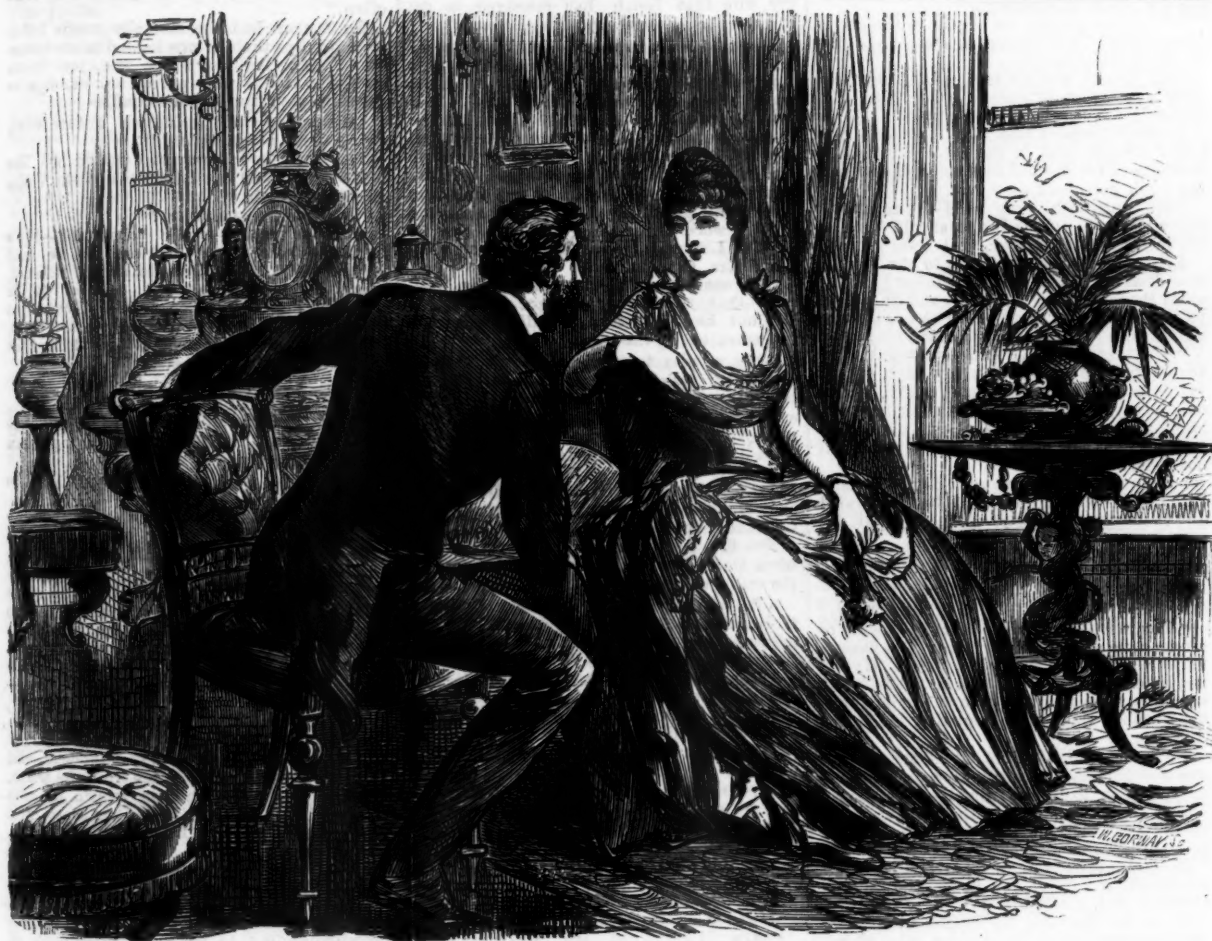
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[ERLSCOURT HAD GAINED ELYSIUM—VIOLET'S SWEET FACE WAS TURNED TO HIM!]

THE EYES OF THE PICTURE.

CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

VIOLET did not look up—she scarcely cared to meet Erlscourt's eyes. But in a minute she had forced herself back into something of her everyday manner.

"Sensitive!" is the gentle word men use to describe feminine foolishness," she said, with a slight laugh. "I am ashamed of myself. Please forgive me! You see—" and she faltered a little. "I—I have suffered myself!"

"I know," said the painter. He turned from her, and took up the brush again, but his hand was not quite steady. There seemed a mist between him and the picture.

For a few minutes utter silence reigned in the room. Even the woman could not at once think how to break it, or whether to break it at all.

Of course in the end it was she, and not the

man, who took the necessary step. And, besides, the painter's story could not rest here, she must know more. She moved a step forward so that she stood at his side.

"Mr. Erlscourt, won't you tell me the rest of your story?" she asked.

He looked at her half doubtfully, but she smiled.

"Oh don't be afraid of me," said she. "I'll wear an adamant heart."

"I don't think you could," said Erlscourt, "but indeed you have heard all I know. I left England the next day; in fact, the case had delayed me; so I lost sight of the girl and know nothing further."

"Poor thing!" said Violet. "Ah well, she has made a lovely picture, and that ought to be consolation to her—only perhaps she knows nothing about it. I wonder if she remembers you as you remember her."

"I don't know. Perhaps after all she owes me little gratitude."

"You saved her life. Did she," said Violet, looking not at him, but at the girl in the picture, "did she seem like one who would forget so great a service?"

He looked at her, then followed her gaze to the picture, and again glanced at the living face. There was a light in his eyes, a smile on the curved lips.

"I don't think so," he said rather absently; he was not thinking at all of the girl in the police-court, but of Violet Herbert's brown eyes, and the brown eyes in the portrait.

Violet moved away to some other pictures; the answer to her query had not satisfied her; and she was angry with herself for having put the question. What did it matter to her what he thought, whether of good or evil, of that unhappy creature? She was restless, ill at ease, but yet lingered, looking at this thing and that, talking of art, of music, listening to the voice that she could not but notice was even softer to her than to others—charmed against her will, and yet yielding to the charm, also against her will. Time flew on golden wings.

"Must you go!" said Erlscourt, as her tiny watch showed him that it was near five. "Well, I must not be selfish, you have been kinder to me than I had any right to expect."

"Why, what have I done but take up your time, plagued you with questions, astonished you with my ignorance?" said Violet, opening her large eyes. "I wonder you let your love of the truth be so obscured by your love of politeness."

"Truth and politeness are hand in hand in this case," said Erlcourt. "My time is of course not mine but yours, and I am glad to have it so."

"Thanks," said she, sanely. "You have left out the plague of questions."

"Will you plague me again whenever it pleases you?" said the artist, stooping to kiss the hand she gave him.

"Ah thanks, you are too good. I have had such a pleasant afternoon. Good-bye, Mr. Erlcourt," she said, a little hurriedly.

Pleasant! what a cold word it seemed. She threw herself back in the cab, looking down at the hand his lips had touched, half shuddering while her cheek grew hot.

"He mustn't kiss my hand—he mustn't," she whispered. "It is I who should kneel at his feet, miserable wretch that I am!"

Erlcourt went back slowly to the studio; how deserted it looked—how sunless! There stood the picture on the easel, and he passed to it, folding his arms as he stood, and the thoughts in his heart did not reach his lips.

"Was there some sympathy between us," so they ran, "before we even saw each other? Why else have I painted these eyes so like hers, only Heaven grant have may never have the look of these! Has my soul seen her before even my eyes saw her? It must be so; I will not believe in chance."

"I cannot work any more to-day," he said, half aloud. "Oh if time could be annihilated and to-morrow be to-day! How can I wait till I see her again?"

CHAPTER IX.

"You must let me bring Morton Greville to dinner one day, Emmie," Mrs. Challoner's brother had said to her not long before. He had known his sister too well to bring his friend to her house unawares, and if anyone might have done such a thing with impunity, Leigh was that person.

But no one might; Mrs. Challoner was not one of those ladies who delight in promiscuous droppings in to dinner. She liked to be prepared; but once prepared the guest was sure of a hearty welcome and minute care as to his comfort and pleasure.

So, after his warning, Erlcourt had brought his friend, or "chum," as he called him, and Greville had made his own way, not very difficult, for childless Emily had a motherly weakness for young men, and in spite of her admonitions and her horror at many of their characteristics and pursuits, spoiled them a good deal.

Besides, she looked at all young men as inferior editions of her darling, who was the delight and the pest of her life. Miss Dora, who though a country girl was very sharp and apprehensive, divined another reason for Emily's kindly reception of young Greville.

"Cousin Emily," said the astute young woman to herself, "is in a chronic fever over that brother of hers, and the fever has taken an aggravated form since the advent of Mrs. Herbert. She looks on Mr. Greville as a sort of universal intelligencer."

Dora was not ill-pleased herself at the position Greville acquired. She showed it to-night when he was coming to dine, and afterwards escort the ladies to the theatre, in feminine fashion, by putting on a gown every one considered highly becoming. A somewhat heightened colour, as she descended to the drawing-room, added to her appearance.

"Have you seen Leigh to-day, Mr. Greville?" asked Mrs. Challoner, as they all seated themselves at table.

Mr. Challoner, serving out soup with practised rapidity, laughed.

"That's always my wife's first thought, Greville," said he, "Leigh first, and the rest of the world nowhere. It's a good thing he's so fine tempered."

Emily joined good-naturedly, as she always did, in the laugh against herself; she was proud of her favouritism.

"I believe you're jealous of Leigh, Cousin Arthur," said Dora, sanely.

"Be quiet, you impudent puss!" retorted her cousin. "Now, Greville, won't you tell my wife that Leigh has managed to get through the day without her assistance?"

"I believe I can say that," answered Greville. "Mrs. Challoner, it's a shame to laugh at you. I wish every fellow had some one to be always thinking about him."

This sentimentally uttered speech roused Dora's youthful flippancy. She laughed merrily. Greville, half-meaning the speech for her, was inclined to be vexed, but her laughter was infectious, and he was obliged to give up his pique. It did not make the two any the worse friends.

"Did Leigh say he was coming to-night?" asked Mrs. Challoner.

"He wasn't sure. I gave him your message—that there was plenty of room in our box, but he seemed to have half-promised to join some one in the stalls."

"It's a pity to waste a place," said Mr. Challoner, "since I could not go. Wish I could, instead of putting over," said A. B., "and I've half a mind to spoil sport, Dora, and make you play clerk to me."

"I'll stop," said she, heretically, looking so happy and mischievous as a puppy.

"Oh, no!" cried Greville. "That's too bad, Mr. Challoner," and the energetic protest made Dora look happier than ever.

The first act of the Haymarket was over when Dora, leaning over to look down into the stalls, turned suddenly to Emily.

"There's Leigh," said she—for, of course, formalities had been speedily dropped. "Bad fellow! he doesn't see us. He's too busy bowing to someone else. Who is it?"

"Mrs. Herbert, I think," said Greville, who had caught the direction in which his friend had been looking. "I'll go and fetch Erlcourt if you like, Miss Maine."

"Oh, do—no—he won't come," said Dora. "He saw me just now, and I signalled him to come, and he shook his head. Perhaps he will presently."

Mrs. Challoner had meanwhile been quietly directing her opera glass to every imaginable place where the obnoxious Mrs. Herbert could or could not be, including the flies.

After so much trouble it was rather aggravating to hear Greville say—

"Mrs. Herbert has gone. I saw her leave just now."

Mrs. Challoner looked at once down into the stalls.

Yes! there was the curly head she was looking for.

"I am so sorry she's gone," said Dora. "I so wanted to see her! Leigh said she was so pretty."

"My dear Dora," said Emily, "I don't imagine Mrs. Herbert is the sort of person you could associate with."

"What's the harm in her?" asked the young lady. "You know her, Mr. Greville—does she bite? Cousin Emily thinks she does, and Mrs. Harrington goes there!"

This was unfortunate, as Greville knew Mrs. Harrington not to be over particular as to her society.

"I don't see any harm in Mrs. Herbert," said he; "though people do talk about her. I don't see what cause she gives for scandal."

"Who is she?" asked Emily. "Who was her husband?"

"I really don't know, Mrs. Challoner, but I am sure no one could fail to see she is a perfect lady. As to her husband she never speaks of him. I suppose he is dead. There may be a hundred reasons for her silence about him, and I don't think people ought to

spring to an evil one directly," said Greville, flushing a little.

The flush deepened as he encountered Dora's eyes fixed on him with a look of half-shy approval.

"You're like Leigh," said Emily, "you champion a pretty woman who no doubt knows how to keep you all at her feet."

"She never flirts, Mrs. Challoner," said Greville, with extreme eagerness, and glancing at Dora, "not even with Leigh, who is there often."

No sooner had the unlucky words fallen from his lips than he saw he had made a mistake. Mrs. Challoner's face was, just for an instant, a study. She pursed up her lips as she said, after that awful second,—

"A woman with unknown antecedents, living alone, not in society."

The terrible indictment dropped out like lead. What could be said worse against Violet Herbert after that?

"What is the attraction?"

"She's pretty—she's charming—she's musical—there is not a word to be said against her," began Greville, in hot defence, when Dora, who had not seemed to be listening, just turned her head and looked at him. The warning was almost too late. Mrs. Challoner had caught one word that like a fuse fired a whole train.

"And I suppose Leigh plays with her?" she said, fixing her eyes on Greville's face.

"I really don't know. I believe he has done so sometimes," answered the young man rather confusedly.

"Be quiet," said Dora, imperatively, "the curtain's rising."

Not to the stage, however, though the play was attractive, did Emily turn her eyes oftenest. She watched that stall beneath with untiring persistence, and so frequently was she attracted by the sight of the same form sitting there that at last she began to breathe freely. She attended to the play, it interested her. At last the curtain dropped. Amidst the clapping and cheers, Dora's whisper to Greville sounded clear and sharp,—

"Leigh has gone!"

"That dreadful woman!" thought Mrs. Challoner in the strongest italics. It looked all so plain to her—what had happened, and yet it was so utterly different from the truth. That dreadful woman had known he was coming and had let him see her there, and then gone away, and he had followed her. That was settled. In truth Erlcourt had seen Violet in a box with Mrs. Harrington and her husband. Erlcourt had resisted the desire to go to her box because he knew his sister was in the house, but he had managed, notwithstanding, to see every movement of Violet's. He had seen her glance over the house, half-searchingly, with a smile on her lips; he had seen the smile fade and her eyes grow wild and startled, and her cheek become white. He had turned his head swiftly, instinctively, to see what had caused that sudden change, and had had no satisfaction beyond gazing at rows of inoffensive faces, male and female.

Still apparently bent on the play, he had known that Violet sat pale and drooping, feigning interest and pleasure, and the man had bit his lip and there had shot into his heart a jealous pang and a terrible doubt. If he could have gone to her, been beside her! And then she had bent towards her companions and said something, and risen up, taking Harrington's arm, and the two had left the box. Presently Harrington had come back alone. Erlcourt sat motionless, eating his very heart out; the bright clever piece, half fun, half pathos, jarred unbearably. What or who had she seen—what vision had scared her—what past had come back to her? Racked beyond the limits of utmost patience, he had got up at last, made an excuse to his friend, and left the theatre—not to follow Violet but simply because he could not bear himself. And yet Emily's theory fitted in very nicely—as

theories often do and are quite wrong all the same.

Morton Greville declined the invitation to return to supper at Hamilton terrace, and had just put his charges into their hired brougham, and held Dora's hand a little longer than he need have done, and turned away, when someone slapped him on the shoulder.

"Going my way, Mr. Greville?" said Gilbert Venner's deep tones.

"Depends what your way is," answered the young man.

"I thought of taking a turn at King's," said Venner, carelessly. "It's too early to go home—will you come? Just a game or two and then our virtuous coaches."

"Don't mind if I do," said Greville, but hesitatingly. "It's a good while since I've been at King's. Shall we walk?"

"Yes—it isn't far. I say, that was a deuced pretty girl you put in the carriage," said Venner, with a sly smile that in most men would have been only fun, but in him was offensive.

"Yes," said Greville, shortly. "A relation of Challoner, the Q.C. How's the club getting on?"

"Flourishing, my son!" answered Venner. "But you're such a well-behaved one!—you don't know much about it."

Greville lighted a cigar, without being in the least ashamed by this remark.

"I don't care for that sort of club," said he, offering his companion his cigar-case. "Lots of gambling, Venner. Besides, I've got my way to make. I'm not a gentleman at large like you."

"Ah! well, you've got an incentive to work," said Venner. "Lucky dog!"

Greville's haughty stare was all the answer he got, and he changed the subject till they reached "King's," the doors of which swung invitingly open, and showed the interior blazing with light.

CHAPTER X.

IF Mrs. Challoner had known the real facts of Erls court's departure from the theatre, perhaps she would not have resolved that very night on speaking to him.

As it was she was so sure she was right—she had so relegated wronged, pure-hearted Violet to the outer darkness of womanhood, and she so little understood the wisdom of not fanning a smouldering flame, that she sought the earliest opportunity for her task.

As often happens, the opportunity dropped into her hands.

Erls court called the very next afternoon in Hamilton terrace—perhaps with a vague idea of diverting any suspicions in his sister's mind.

He had no weak fear of her, but he had a fear of her probing a raw wound.

And, poor fellow, the wound bled sorely that day.

It took all his pride and strong will to preserve his usual demeanour when he entered his sister's drawing-room; but even then he could not hide the physical signs of extreme paleness, and a tired look about the eyes.

"My dear boy," said his sister, kissing him, "how glad I am to see you!"

"That's nothing new, my sweetest old Mentor," said Erls court, "you always are glad. Where's Miss Mischief?"

"Dora? She went to Arthur's chambers this morning. He was to take her to lunch and then show her the Temple and the Law Courts. She won't be back till dinner, can't you stop till then?"

"Perhaps I will, if you'll overlook morning dress. Well," said he, choosing, as he usually did, the most comfortable lounging chair in the room; "how did you like the play?"

"Very much," she gave him a sort of gauging glance, and hesitated; but before she could speak Erls court struck in quickly.

"Dora liked it; anyhow, she looked happy enough. How long does she stay?"

"All the season. It is her first long visit to London. Arthur and I are very glad to have her."

"She's a dear little soul," said Erls court, in an elder brother manner; "but Arthur is such a good fellow I don't see how any one of his blood could be disagreeable; I wish you'd bring Dora over to my place, Emmie. It turned wet last time, you remember, and you are such a piece of propriety you won't let her come by herself. I don't see why she shouldn't."

"I do, Leigh," frigidly. "I am afraid you are getting very Bohemian, as you call it. Pray don't forget the customs of ladies in good society. Why didn't you come up to our box last night?" she added, while Erls court opened his brown eyes and wished he had been endowed with prophetic powers.

"I should if I had stopped, but I left early. You were in good hands, I knew."

"Yes; Mr. Greville is very pleasant and nice," said Mrs. Challoner. "Weren't you well that you left so soon?"

"Quite, thanks; when am I anything else?"

"Then you work too hard," said Emily, beating about the bush in an aggravating manner, "you look tired and pale."

If Erls court had not possessed that generosity of temper that belongs to some strong natures, he might have turned restive at these words.

There is nothing more annoying than to have your outward signs of weakness planted upon when you are so perfectly conscious of them yourself.

"Well, if I am a little tired," said he, good-humouredly, "that's just the reason for having a rest. Do let a fellow alone, Mentor. I shall return to my old name for you. How you did haul me over the coals when I was at Eton!"

She smiled: she could not help it at the recollection of the handsome mischief-loving lad who was always up to pranks, who listened to her scoldings and laughed and kissed her, and sprang away to some other "lark," not in the least impressed, following his own wilful way.

The boy seemed only to have developed, not changed, as strong-willed, as impossible a subject for anger.

"I am not going to do that now," she said, "but I confess I did want to speak to you seriously, Leigh, and you must not be angry with me; that you never are, though, but you laugh at me often."

"What is the momentous point?" said the painter; the hand lying on the arm of his chair; lying lightly and carelessly, pressed itself closer into the soft velvet.

"About—well dear," said Emily, somewhat embarrassed, "I fancy you are getting into friendships not quite desirable."

"One friendship, Emily," said Erls court, quietly, "that is what you mean. Well, what is against it?"

"I was alluding to Mrs. Herbert. I believe she was at the Haymarket last night."

"I know—well? Please to be logical, Emmie dear."

"Oh, Leigh," cried Emily, "can't you see how anxious you are making me? Who is this woman at whose house you are so often, about whom no one knows anything, who lives in such an anomalous way? Last night even no sooner does she leave the theatre than you leave too!"

"To follow her?" said Erls court, who had flushed darkly at his sister's first words. "So that is what has been troubling you?" he went on, banteringly, "you couldn't imagine a man of thirty could take care of himself, and Greville has been telling you that the best part of my time is passed at Mrs. Herbert's house—that I play with her, sing with her! Poor Mentor! As a matter of fact, I did not follow her. You have fitted in your theory capitably, Emmie, but it is only theory. If you want to know where I went last night, I walked home."

"Well, I was wrong there, I see, and I am

glad of it. But why go to her house so much?"

"Because it's one of the pleasantest houses I know," said he carelessly.

"Pleasant! You meet all sorts of people there."

"Exactly; that's part of the attraction, people just as good as I am in a social point of view, and better in most other things—artists and professional people. I am professional myself."

"It was not that I meant. I am the last person to set myself up on the score of position. But young men don't go repeatedly to the same house merely for pleasant companionship. I only want to show you, dear Leigh, what danger of entanglement there may be in such an association. For aught you know, Mrs. Herbert's husband may be living! A woman absolutely without credentials. Do you know anything of her?"

"Next to nothing. But men are not like women, Emmie. I don't ask leave to introduce her to you or Dora." He set his teeth as he finished. "I believe in her truth."

"Of course she will tell you what she likes about herself."

"Emmie, you are trying my patience a little too far," said Erls court. "I can't see with your eyes, but don't blame me for that. Why you should look on Mrs. Herbert as an adventuress I don't know; she is not one. I must choose my own friends, Emmie."

"Friends!" said Emily, so vexed as to grow bitter, "a friend you cannot introduce to your sister—a woman who may not even have been married."

Erls court sprang to his feet, his coolness gone, his dark eyes ablaze.

"Emmie, be silent!" he cried fiercely, "you madden me!"

The work she had held dropped from her hands. She looked up into his face, so startled that she forgot the delicate lace lying on the floor. Erls court stooped and picked it up, putting it back on her knee.

"Forgive me, Emmie," he muttered, "I forgot myself." He did not wait for an answer, but went back to his place and sat down again. "Your warning is too late!" he said, under his breath.

"Oh, Leigh, no—oh! don't say that! Think what such words mean! What can be the end of it all?"

"I don't know."

"But you must have thought," said practical Emily.

She had not loved in this fashion herself. She did not understand why there should be such war in the heart of a man of such stainless birth and so firm a will. But she sympathised with his evident suffering, though her sympathy might be blind.

"At your age a man, when he falls in love, thinks definitely of marriage. You do not even know if she is free."

Erls court winced at the stab she had not an idea she was giving.

Had not he thought it all out last night? Had not wave after wave of doubt swept over him?

"Draw back while there is time," went on the unconsenting, merciless tormentor. "If nothing has passed between you, as I hope is the case—"

"Oh, Emmie!" cried Erls court, passionately, "you can never have loved to talk like that to me! I will not—I cannot! Heaven knows if I have the right to love her—but if I knew I had not I must love her just the same! How could I know when I saw her she was to be to me the one woman I could worship and die for? How can a man wrench out from his heart a love Heaven put there? It is not sin; it could never be sin! You judge as the world judges. Because she is young and alone, and does not do by line and rule what others do, you think she cannot be as pure as yourselves. Because she is silent about the past you decide that her past is stained! Do you think,"—he had risen, too stirred and excited to be still—"that I have

never thought of all that you have said to me? But I have never doubted her. I know she has never sinned! I scarcely knew I loved her till the love was beyond recall—and I would not recall it if I could."

"Do you mean to say," said Mrs. Challoner, "that, supposing her to be free, you would marry—yes, so gently born—a woman whose birth may be of the lowest?"

"It cannot be that. You would not dream so for an instant if you saw her," said Erls-court, shrinking from facing a "yes" or "no" to that question.

"Don't disappoint me, Leigh," said Mrs. Challoner, earnestly. "I don't understand you at all, and a great deal of what you have said seems to me wrong and wild. You will not give up this infatuation for a woman who may be bound—who ought not to encourage you. In any case you risk your happiness—dearer to me than my own. If you marry her it is a risk; if you cannot yet remember her always, and that is sin."

"Emmie," said Erls-court, in a low voice, "I will not forget honour."

She looked puzzled. She had not contemplated the danger of his position—its openness to dire temptation, as he thought she did.

She had a vague confidence that somehow he was more immaculate than other men, though why he should have been so set apart by Providence she could not have told.

"I am not afraid of that," she said, proudly. "You trust me more than I trust myself then!" he said, half bitterly.

"Of course I trust you. Honour is dearer to you than anything else," said the woman whose placid nature and sheltered life had shut her out from comprehension or sight of the temptations that wreck life and soul. "I wish you would promise me."

"I will make no promises," said Erls-court, quickly.

"Don't be so impetuous, Leigh. I am not going to ask you to keep away from Mrs. Herbert's house, but make no pledges, say nothing to her."

"I cannot promise," he said again, at once. "Emmie, I don't blame you; in your place I might think the same as you do. I know this must seem a madness, a cruelty to you. I sometimes think so myself. I can see your side clearly. I can go with it partly; but it all comes back to the one thing, I love her! What use to measure that love, to say how much or how little! I don't know myself. I only know that she has glorified all life, that if I never saw her again I should still thank Heaven I had loved her!"

It was all pure rhapsody to Emily. Of course, she was much in the right; of course, as a matter of sense and worldly wisdom, Erls-court had little to say.

Outsiders cannot be expected to believe in love's intuitions, whatever the lover may do; nine times out of ten, the intuitions play false.

But the tenth time there may be a love that possesses heart and soul and dominates the whole life; that love has a power divine.

Still, Emily could not be justly expected to discern such love; it was not her fault that her eyes were holden.

She thought the whole thing exaggerated, that Leigh made a tragedy out of an ordinary drama, that he would calm down and be reasonable.

She failed in sympathy because she thought the suffering unconsciously unreal. And Erls-court felt that keenly, felt, at a very lonely period, that he was misunderstood, thought rhapsodical and a dreamer, under the thrall of a worthless woman.

He felt the sting of one who, in a moment of passion, has opened his soul to dull ears; he was chilled and wounded. A touch of sympathy would have been worth all the wise advice in the world. He came to his sister and leant over her chair.

"Emmie, forgive me what I said to you, you could not know how you hurt me," he said,

bending his face down to hers. "And don't love me less. I cannot make you understand me; perhaps that is my fault. Don't speak to me again about this, it is no use. I must bear my own burdens, heavy or light; and if a word is said against Violet I cannot bear it, and neither can I bear to quarrel with you!"

"My darling," she said, kissing him, "we shall never quarrel. Must I see you go on in this folly and be silent?"

"Nothing you could say would change me, and who knows but it might estrange us? I may lose so much, let me keep what I can. Keep your own counsel, don't tell Arthur. I won't stop to-night, Emmie."

She caught his hand.

"Leigh!"

He drew his hand away quickly, with a flash of something like displeasure in his eyes and a half laugh.

"Pooh! I am not going to her. I am not much in the humour for a lady's drawing-room. Good-bye, Mentor."

Emily went back to her lace-work and mused not hopelessly.

"My own boy, he is not happy; yet it may not last, this madness. I think I see my way; it's a common enough story—a designing woman—for, of course, she is that, and a romantic fellow like Leigh. All the world being against her is quite enough to make him her sworn knight. Horrid creature! I could almost hate her!"

CHAPTER XI.

VERILY if ever a man needed some drop of comfort it was Leigh Erls-court when, after leaving his sister's house, he reached his own home. The unpalatable truths, so hardly put before him, pressed in upon his soul. Though not new to him, yet they took an acuter power of torture when out and dried into so many words.

Did he need to be told that a woman of such doubtful position was not the wife for him? Did it help him to show him in all their nakedness the palpable objections to her? The only answer he could make was no answer at all; that he loved her only proved him blind and folly stricken; it did not prove her immaculate. He had nothing to turn to; he was like a man who has been forced to leave his shelter and stand solitary in a pitiless storm.

Behind him was the feverish happiness that had never been peace; before him almost a blank, for he had nothing to build on. The slightest advance beyond mere friendship had made Violet shrink with a sort of dread, till he dared scarcely venture look or word. He had rarely seen her alone—save during their musical practices, and these of late had been often interrupted. Now he began to think all this had been by design, and of course the memory of last night in the theatre only added to his thousand fears.

Yes, he had been happy in Violet's presence; away from her, restless and unsatisfied, but even that happiness, such as it was, was done with. Unless he could gain all and how little he hoped for that, he must lose all! He started up at the mere thought, flinging off his intense dejection.

"No I cannot—I will not lose! Can a few hard words have turned me coward! I will see her to-night. To-night! I remember she will not be alone. No matter—if only I see her, touch her hand!"

It was not yet dusk; the clear summer evening shone radiant over the park, children's voices shrill and merry echoed through the still air. Erls-court, too impatient to walk, stopped the first hansom he saw, with a promise of extra fare if the man drove quickly.

Lucie, who admitted the artist, smiled brightly; he was a favourite with Violet's shrewd maid.

"You needn't announce me," said Erls-court as quietly as he could when every nerve was

quivering, and Lucie nodded and withdrew, muttering to herself that she couldn't make the mistress out.

Quickly Erls-court entered the familiar room; he drew breath more easily when once he was within the charmed atmosphere, and when the young hostess, seeing him, came forward, all his agony of an hour ago seemed like a farce, a dream, yet it had left its impress. At first he could not say a word, while he kept her hands, closing both his over them with the unconscious hold of possession. It was but a second; perhaps Violet's slowly rising colour recalled him to himself.

"I have taken advantage of your friendship, you see," he said.

"You are always welcome," said Violet, in an even, almost placid, way. "I told you I should have a few friends to-night. I think you know them all, don't you?"

Just common-place society phrases, and his heart was burning within him, and hers was trembling and fainting. Yet the one went amongst the guests, smiling, with a word for each, the other turned sweetly to a presumably musical young lady and begged the favour of a song.

Later in the evening some one proposed cards; Violet assented, but asked to be excused from playing.

"Why, Violet?" asked Annie Harrington. "Come, no nonsense; we must have you."

"Indeed no! I never play cards."

"I know you never have, but it's never too late to mend."

"I am so stupid at them," said Violet. "You have enough without me, and I am tired to-night."

She kept glancing in a nervous way at the cards lying on the table, and then instinctively her large eyes went to Erls-court, where he stood a few steps away. How appealing they looked! How plainly they said,—

"I am sick at heart to-night—help me!"

He came forward.

"I picked up a new game the other night," he said, addressing no one in particular. "I wish you'd let me show it you. Mrs. Herbert, you never play, so it's no good trying to teach you. There's your favourite chair by the window; please go and sit there; you can look at the sky while we gamble."

He led her half laughingly to the seat in the far window, where the scented air came invitingly in, saw her placed there, and then went back to the table. It was to him banishment, and he hated the cards—if he could have hated anything that helped him to save her. Violet sat, leaning her head on her hand, listening to the chatter and laughter from the other end of the room, often quietly watching one face at the table, often with her eyes turned to the darkening sky and her thoughts busied with heavier matters than any there guessed.

Presently Erls-court started at a touch on his shoulder and looked up into Morton Greville's face.

"You here, old fellow!" he said.

"Don't you see me? I say, you're going wrong, Erls-court," said Greville, taking a card from the painter's hand. "You pretend to be teaching the others."

"Well, then," said Erls-court, with a curious smile curling his lip, "take my place; you know the game better than I do."

He rose, and before Greville could resist, pushed him down into his chair.

"But I haven't paid my respects yet," said Morton, aghast.

"I'll pay them for you. I'll come and see how you get on presently."

He walked off coolly, giving no time for remonstrance, and, crossing to Violet, drew forward a chair to her side. Greville looked after him, suppressed a remark, and speedily engaged the attention of the card-players.

And Erls-court had gained Elysium. Violet turned her soft face to him.

"You need not thank me," said the painter before she could speak. "Is it not my whole duty and pleasure to serve you?" with an intensity of earnestness underlying the

words. Any one of the men about her would have said more. The look in the dark eyes bent on her brought the vivid colour to her cheek. Yet she turned from him as she answered almost coldly,—

"It is very good of you to say so, I am sure." Then, as if she feared she had overdone it, she added, lightly,—

"How did you know I was going to thank you at all? I might have thought the service needed none."

"You would thank me because you cannot but be gracious; but my service is due whether it is acknowledged or not," answered Erlscourt following her lead. For once more he had felt himself repelled. Yet she had appealed to him when she wanted only a trifling assistance. "Are you tired to-night? I fancied you were."

"I am tired," she said, and paused, with a covert glance at him to see how he had understood that involuntary pause. She added directly, "Isn't that reason enough for preferring to sit here near the flowers and look at that lovely sky to turning over those horrid bits of painted cardboard?"

"I hate them!" she said with a startling change in voice and manner. "How can they sit for hours over them! Pleasure! what a miserably abused word it is!"

Something had stirred her out of her usual reserve and quiet. Erlscourt's thoughts sprang back to last night. Was the cause to be found then?

"I did not know you had such a horror of them," he said, "though of course I noticed you never played. Why, forgive me, why do you allow in your own house what pains you?"

"What else do some of them care for?" she said, bitterly. "What does it matter what is done here?"

"You must not say that," said Erlscourt, quickly. "Don't speak so!"

"Why not?" She looked at him, and her eyes filled suddenly.

"I don't know what sort of humour I am in to-night," she said, drooping her head. "I didn't mean to pain you."

"Do you think you can say such things of yourself and not pain me? And since you have touched the subject, may I say what I have had so long in my mind—that you wrong yourself—that others wrong you and judge you by those about you?"

"Ah, but I must," she said, pressing her hands tightly together. "I know it, but what does it matter?"

"Does it not matter," said Erlscourt, forcing himself to speak without overt passion, "that you are looked down on—that you are reckoned as one with people you should not know? I have no right to speak so to you, but I cannot help it. I cannot bear for you to injure yourself and let the world dare to pass you by with scorn! There cannot be a must."

Just so he had pleaded years ago—just so had the whole pure loyal soul of the man looked from the deep brown eyes, yet there was a difference. Then he was only pleading to be allowed to help. She was not a girl now; she had suffered almost all she could suffer, and she knew what lay beneath this pleading—knew that had they been alone, he had been kneeling at her feet, and praying for the right to shield her from a breath of scorn!

"Why must you!" repeated Erlscourt, more gently, while she sat crushed and silent. "You do not answer. Have I angered you?"

"No, but I cannot explain," she answered, and shivered.

"If I have said too much, forgive me," said Erlscourt, softly.

Again that tremor shook her. She set her lips in a desperate resolve.

"Mr. Erlscourt, I am not angry, I am very grateful," she said, "but it is not the same for me as it would be for the woman of your world. You are generous and kind; you must make allowances for me. I am not reckless."

Even while her lips blackened herself, her heart cried out against the fiat in those words she had not meant to say. "But—but it does not hurt me."

"Hush, Violet!" said Erlscourt, in so strained a voice that it did not sound like his own, and her name, too!

She sprang up suddenly with a careless laugh.

"I have left my other guests too long," she said. "Come, Mr. Erlscourt, I am tired of one place, if you are not."

Whatever words would have rushed to his lips were stayed effectually. He followed her silently to the table, he even joined in a game, though he scarcely knew what cards were in his hand, and played mechanically. His heart was on fire, his brain dizzy, his faith clinging frantically to its idol. He bore the jesting and merriment as long as he could, but the limit was reached at last, and he rose abruptly.

"Going?" said Violet, standing at Mrs. Harrington's side.

"It is late," he said, smiling, "and I can't be idle to-morrow. Good-night."

"I don't believe you," his eyes said plainly as they looked straight into hers, till they were forced to droop. She flushed all over and turned away.

(To be continued.)

THE CURSE OF THE LESTERS.

—O—

CHAPTER XXV.

It was the strangest change in Vana's life, when she came back from the seaside, and joined Lady Redmond in London, to know that the long struggle to please Aunt Hephzibah's somewhat exacting temper, and to keep the spoilt children at the Vicarage in order, was over. David Devenish's love had smoothed all worldly troubles from her path. She was mistress of the White House, and five thousand a year, and until she came of age the Countess of Redmond had promised to consider her her ward.

Lady Redmond was not a person to do things by halves. For love of the girl's dead mother she had taken Vana to her heart. She was quite resolved, if power of hers could hide the secret, that Vana should never know she was not the child of the Vicar of Vale Lester's brother; but for her own satisfaction she felt the strongest yearning to know the true story of the girl's parentage. One thing only puzzled her. Vana gave her age as just nineteen; it was twenty years turned since the man she suspected of luring Dorothy Tempest from her home had told her he would give years of his life to find her, but then, on the other hand, poor Dorothy, in her desire to hide her child from the husband who had deceived her, might probably have represented Vana as a year less than her real age.

Before Miss Tempest went to the seaside her kind friend drew her out a little as to her past life. Vana could remember no earlier home than France, but she knew from her mother she had been born in England, in a very poor part of London, where Mrs. Tempest gained a living by working for the fancy shops.

Her mother had often told her of the quaint East-end suburb and the church, with its old tower and graceful graveyard which seemed such a contrast to the strife and tumult of the busy streets around her, and Lady Redmond, who possessed an illustrated guide to the churches round London, at once recognized the place, and made up her mind she would go some day and search the register for Vana's birth.

She had loved Dorothy Tempest so faithfully she believed firmly it was some cruel mistake which had separated her from her husband and brought up her child as fatherless.

Nothing in the world would have convinced the Countess of the truth which had been so readily accepted by the Vicar of Vale Lester that the pretty violet-eyed girl was "nobody's daughter."

A careful search in an old journal and Lady Redmond found the exact date on which Dorothy left her situation. It was, according to Vana, full two years before her own birth, but my lady had a strange suspicion that her favourite was mistaken in this instance.

Vana thought she was three years old when they went to France, but she might well have been four or even more without anyone suspecting it.

My lady said nothing even to her own husband of the expedition. She did not take her own carriage, but hailed a cab from the nearest stand, and was driven rapidly away to the East-end.

She found the church easily. It agreed perfectly both with Vana's description and with the picture in the book. Fortune favoured the Countess, for a service was just concluded, and the clergyman, leaving the vestry, a word of wishing to see the register, and he took her back there, and courteously placed her a chair.

"I have been vicar here for over thirty years, Lady Redmond," he told her quietly, "so I think I can answer any questions you wish to put, but I fear you are mistaken in the church. We have few romances in this old-fashioned East-end suburb. I don't think in all the time I have been here I have married half-a-dozen brides whose refinement and beauty would strike me as you say your friend's must have done."

"She may not have been married here," persisted the Countess, "but I know her only child was christened at this church. I will trust you with her story, Mr. Benson, and then I think you will be ready to help me," and Lady Redmond told Vana's history, or as much as she knew of it.

"You see, poverty can never touch her again, and I shall do all I can to make her happy; but she is so beautiful, lovers are sure to come to her, and as I don't believe she ever gave her heart to that poor fellow who died, I want to be able to feel that if any one ever cared for her I could tell him truly that she came of honest parentage."

"I think I understand. If the poor girl is really nobody's daughter, you would feel bound to confess it to any one who wanted to marry her?"

"Yes; according to Vana she was born in September, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, which makes her just nineteen and a half, but I have grave reason for thinking she must be older."

Mr. Benson started. "Vana! I remember the name perfectly. It was a sad story; the mother was the loveliest creature I ever saw, and I liked the husband's face. They were married here sometime in sixty-one, I forget the date."

"Married?"

"Certainly; but there was a hitch in the ceremony, at least he told her so, and she believed him. I remember I thought myself at the time if she had had a clever lawyer to fight her battle things might have gone differently, but she would not hear of it. He had told her she was not his wife, and her one dread, poor girl, seemed to be that he should find her. I will show you the register, and you will see the signature for yourself."

Lady Redmond did see. She recognised the handwriting of Dorothy Tempest, and it was just as she had expected. Vana's father and Dorothy's husband was the man she had long ago put down in her own mind as the tempter who had wiled away her friend.

"I cannot understand it," she said slowly. "To me everything seems perfectly in form."

"It seems he told her—Heaven forgive him, for I believe it was a lie—he had been married before, and his wife was living. It was a private marriage—Miss Tempest's I mean—and she was always pressing him to acknowledge it and

introduce her to his family. He was recklessly extravagant and fond of high society. A very fascinating man, alone and unnumbered, he was welcome everywhere. A wife would have been a great drawback to his popularity."

"But how could he tell her that?"

"It was cruel and heartless, but I fancy he never thought she would leave him. I happen to know that he came into a large sum of money soon after, and that he sought her most anxiously. He never came here; perhaps he thought the place where she spent the first days of her married life would be the last spot she would go to in her trouble."

"Then they lived here?"

"Miss Tempest lived here three weeks to complete the time of residence. They were married by banns, then they stayed here two days afterwards."

"And he is rich now?" said my lady.

"Rich, and childless, I should like to tell him."

"I would not advise it. He has married again, and has other ties. Poor Miss Tempest came back here, and the little girl was born here. She was christened Vana Tempest to give her a surname, for the mother would never use her husband's, though, as I told her, she had a right to do so until that first marriage was proved. She stayed here until the child was three or four years old, I forget which."

"I should like the exact date of Vana's birth."

"You shall have it," and he turned over the leaves of the bulky volume rapidly. "You will see it is filled in exactly as though the marriage was legal. I persuaded the mother as to that, I thought it could wrong no one, and it might save the poor girl a pang some day."

Lady Redmond took a copy of the certificate away with her. It recorded briefly that Vana Tempest, child of Percy Lester, gentleman, and Dorothy his wife was baptized on the second of October eighteen sixty-two, being then four weeks old. It was just exactly what she had expected, but as she looked the paper away in her desk on her return home, she reflected that the discovery changed Vana's fortunes wonderfully. All depended on the legality of her mother's marriage. Lady Redmond, like the rest of the world, had heard of Simon Lester's will and Sir George's recent murder; she knew if Percy outlived his brother and sister, and passed Sir George's age at the time of his death, he would come in for the great prize—a million of money, and Vana might be his heiress.

A million of money! and the girl already had five thousand a year, and a fine country house! How very careful they must be what people they introduced to her. With her beauty she might well be a peeress, and then Lady Redmond fell to thinking of the man who must one day bear her husband's title, Sir Lovel Delamere.

"No," she concluded after half-an-hour's anxious thought, "it would never do. Lovel is so sensitive he ought never to marry any one whose birth was called in question. I think I shall keep my discovery to myself. If anyone did come forward and the story of her parentage was dividing them, I would write to Percy Lester myself, and ask him plainly to tell me the truth."

"I need not worry yet. Vana is still very delicate, it would not do for her to 'come out' or anything of that sort. I shall not let her see any strangers, and it will be time enough to think of the future when she comes of age."

Perhaps this resolve was strengthened by the Earl. On one of those early spring days before Vana's coming, he told his wife very gravely, he had consented to the plan only to please her, and that in return she must make him a solemn promise the moment she saw the shadow of an attachment arising between Sir Lovel and her protégée to send Miss Tempest away on some excuse.

"I have set my heart on Lovel's marrying Nora," concluded the peer. "I don't want to prevent your being as kind to this poor child

as ever you like, only remember she is not to be Lady Delamere."

And Vana, knowing nothing of Lady Redmond's researches or the Earl's stipulation joined the family in March with the bloom of returning health upon her cheeks, and a great gratitude at her heart for all the kindness received.

It was almost happiness to her to know that Vale Lester Viscountage would never be her home again.

She had asked Mr. Graham whether she should write and acquaint her aunt with her safety, but he replied,—

"By no means. So long as you are a minor I believe Mr. and Mrs. Tempest could claim your guardianship. The property fortunately was left to me in trust for you, so that I can fight Mrs. Morton and her mother should they attempt to get possession of it. All you have to do, Miss Tempest, is to grow strong and well, and wait till you are of age for the rest."

Lady Redmond did one thing. She told Vana they had sent for the certificate of her baptism, which proved she would be twenty-one on her next birthday.

"So you see, young lady, you will only be under my authority for six months, and I mean to be a very strict guardian as my powers are so limited."

But she was not. She and Nora vied with each other in making the young stranger feel at home. Lord Redmond petted her almost as he did his own niece.

The servants treated her as a daughter of the house, and through those spring days Vana would have been perfectly happy but for the memory of one little year ago when she was Basil Lester's love.

Of Basil she never heard; probably he was in Ireland preparing his home for Fenella. Vana thought if she could once know they were married, the worst pain of her loss would be over.

It would be a sin to go on loving Basil when he was another woman's husband, and the old wound was still open; time seemed powerless to heal it.

Life at the Redmonds was free from all painful associations. There were pleasant drives and rides. A master was engaged to cultivate her music and her singing.

When the Countess was disengaged she would take the two girls to concert, opera, or flower show; but—avowedly in deference to Vana's deep mourning—Miss Tempest never accompanied Nora and her aunt to any of their friends, and whenever there was a large gathering at home she did not appear.

"Don't you feel it a little hard?" asked Nora, one night when she was going to a brilliant ball, and Vana had come in to see her dressed. "You are ten times prettier than I am. Doesn't it seem a shame that you should be left at home?"

"Not a bit. I have no wish to go. I don't think any ball in the world would have a charm for me."

Nora touched the soft black dress.

"Forgive me," she said, tenderly, "I am always forgetting all you have lost. You must feel almost like a widow."

Vana shook her head.

"Oh, no; David was very good to me, and I loved him dearly as a friend, but I wasn't thinking of him when I spoke."

"Love is terrible, I think," said Nora, suddenly sobered, and speaking with, for her, almost solemnity. "Vana, don't you think it brings more pain than pleasure?"

The girl, whose heart had been well-nigh broken by Basil Lester's fickleness, would not agree with this.

She had suffered terribly; her whole life seemed blighted; but yet she would not have undone her loving. She had been happy once. It was Basil's weakness, not her love, which had made that happiness such a fleeting joy.

"I think there is nothing like love," she answered, slowly. "It is the only gift in

the world we cannot give away to whom we will, and it is the only one that never dies."

"Yes," said Nora, dreamily. "But if one loved the wrong person, Vana, how terrible it would be! I often think, if things had not gone right with me, I should never have got over it."

Vana looked up quickly.

"I did not know you were engaged, dear."

"Oh, it is not exactly an engagement," returned the pretty, warm-hearted Nora. "Lovel has never really proposed to me; only it is uncle's dearest wish that we should be married; and Lovel comes here more often than he ever did before. You said yourself yesterday, Vana, he nearly lived here. Aunt says he knows quite well what uncle has set his heart upon, and that his liking to be with me so often shows he wishes it, too."

Vana was silent.

Briefly she reviewed Sir Lovel's conduct since she had joined the Redmonds. It was true he came very often to the house, true that he would give up any other engagement rather than refuse an invitation of Lady Redmond's.

He showed Nora the kindest brotherly affection, but it had never struck Miss Tempest that he was in love with her.

The girl who had suffered so much herself through love was very quick to denote the tender passion, and certainly she would never have said it existed in Sir Lovel's heart for Nora Redmond.

"You don't like Lovel," said Nora, interrupting her musings; "at least, you never seem to; but even you must admit that he is a lover to be proud of. Vana, do you know I had set my heart on you two being friends? and yet you never seem to grow the least bit more intimate."

"I am very sorry," said Vana, feeling some reply was expected from her. "I think Sir Lovel has one of the truest faces I ever met; and I am sure he will make anyone he loves happy."

It was quite true, but Nora received the words in a sense never meant by Vana.

"Then you think I shall be happy? You see, Vana, it will be so much nicer than marrying a stranger. Lovel has no one in the world nearer to him than uncle and aunt. I shall not have to be scrutinised by ever so many near relations."

"They would be critical, indeed, to object to you," said Vana, with a smile. "Is Sir Lovel to be at the ball to-night?"

"Of course. Vana, I will tell you a secret—I shouldn't care to go a bit else."

Another five minutes, and they had set off. Lady Redmond had an old-fashioned prejudice in favour of punctuality, so that she and Nora were generally the earliest arrivals at any entertainment.

Sir Lovel Delamere knew this, and yet he arrived half an hour later, apparently to accompany them to the ball.

He would not leave a message with the servant, but said he would see Miss Tempest.

Almost a son of the house, the old butler saw nothing strange in this, and ushered him into the morning-room, where Vana was reading a novel.

But for that confidence of Nora's, Vana would have been as indifferent as the butler, but poor Nora's confession, that but for meeting Lovel she would not care for the ball, made her friend positively angry with the baronet when he sat down and began to talk to her as comradely as though his duty did not call him elsewhere.

"I am very sorry they have started," said Vana, quietly; "but if you make haste you won't be so very late, and I daresay Nora will have saved some dances for you."

"Shall I tell you a secret, Miss Tempest? I hate balls, and I never meant to go to this one. Don't look at me with such virtuous indignation. It's hardly a crime for a man to stay away from a party."

"It is if he 'ought' to be there."

Lovel smiled.

"Oh, Miss Tempest, how severe you are—"

but really there is no 'ought' in the matter. I called at Lady Dugdale's only this afternoon, and told her I should be prevented from coming."

"And yet you came here to accompany Lady Redmond and Nora!"

"That was a mistake of the worthy butler which I did not trouble myself to contradict. As a fact, I came here to see you!"

Vana shivered from head to foot.

"Don't shudder like that," cried Sir Lovel, passionately; "don't shrink away from me as though I were some repulsive animal. Vana, you must have seen what my feelings are. For days I have been trying to get a chance of speaking to you, but it is almost as difficult to get a word with you alone as though you were a cloistered nun. Don't look down at your black dress. I know perfectly that Mr. Devenish has been dead barely six months, but I don't believe your heart is buried in his grave. You will love again some day, and why should I not tell you that I worship you and would give the whole world to win your heart?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried poor Vana, with a feeling akin to horror as she remembered Nora's confidence.

"No, you must hear me out. You are too true to be prejudiced against me, because that child Nora may have told you I said it was madness to bring you here. I did say it. I was as set against you as man could be, but remember, I had never seen you. From the moment I saw your face, Vana, you have had no more devoted friend than I. I have loved you ever since you came here in March. For your sake I have inflicted myself on Lady Redmond till I should think I had tired out even her hospitality. I have haunted this house day after day just to be near you."

"I am so sorry."

Sir Lovel looked into her eyes with deep love shining in his own.

"Dear," he said, gently, "don't let any false pride, any idle scruples, come between us. If you think it disrespectful to the dead man who loved you to listen to me yet, only tell me and I will wait patiently until he has been gone a year; but Vana, I could not be near you and not speak. I felt I must risk all and know at least if my cause were hopeless."

Vana looked up. She knew that Lovel Delamere meant every word he said. She knew that his love was as true and fervent as David's own. And there was Nora Redmond who believed his heart was hers. What could be done? How could she refuse Sir Lovel and yet keep Nora's secret?

"I can never marry you," said Vana, gently. "I like you very much. I would trust you sooner than any one in the world, but we can never be more than friends."

Sir Lovel hesitated.

"Lady Redmond has often spoken to me of you," he said, slowly; "and I have heard something of your life at Vale Lester. Dear, are you sending me away because you think me mean enough to be ashamed that my wife was once an orphan girl teaching for her living? I may not be a very unselfish sort of fellow, Vana, but I am not so base as that."

Vana put her little hand in his, and looked up into his face.

"I can trust you," she said, simply. "I know you will keep my secret. A year ago, before I ever met Mr. Devenish, I was engaged to be married. It is an old story now. Last autumn my lover forsook me for an heiress. In the depth of my sorrow Mr. Devenish came, and I told him all. He was content to take me as I was, and I hoped time would heal the old wound. But no time has changed my feelings. I know he who was once my hero is false as a fancy; but yet I know within my heart that I shall never care for any one else. Some people can love twice, but I cannot. I gave away my heart once and it was for ever!"

"Heaven bless you!" They were his first words, full almost of a reverential pity. He

was thinking how few girls in Belgravia would have had the courage to make such a confession? How few would have let a dead love stand between them and such honours as he could lavish on his bride! "Heaven bless you!" he repeated, earnestly. "Vana, I am answered. I know it is all in vain; but, oh! my love, I would have made you happy if you could have trusted yourself to me."

"I know it!" Her tears were falling fast; "but, Sir Lovel, even were it otherwise, I am no wife for you. You ought to marry a girl of old family, used to the rank your wife must own. I thought you meant to do so. Lord Redmond's wishes are no secret. Where could you find any one sweeter or fairer than his niece?"

"Nora!" Sir Lovel spoke half wonderingly, "she is a pretty child, and a good one; but her face will never touch men's hearts as yours does!"

"She is all that is good and true."

He smiled satirically.

"And a marriage with her would be such a fitting thing, so agreeable to society and *les convenances*. Vana, don't you preach worldly wisdom to me. I have enough of that from others."

He had risen to go. She looked at him sorrowfully.

"I shall love you always," he said, in answer to the look; "but you must not reproach yourself for that. Loving you can only make a man better, and you never gave me any encouragement, Vana. I knew from the very first what a forlorn hope it was. Say Heaven bless you, dear, and I will go."

Five minutes later he was walking down the street, while poor Vana buried her face in her hands and wept as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXV.

To go back to the March evening on which Dr. Stone set out for Ireland to warn Basil Lester of the strange conduct of his *fiancée*. There were very few passengers by the Irish mail. Whether the severity of the elements—it was a bitter night, and the east wind blew lustily—had frightened intending travellers, or whether it was not the right time of year for the trip, Dr. Stone did not trouble himself to debate, but he remarked how very few people there were starting, and privately hoped he should have a carriage to himself—in which ambition he was so far successful that when the train started out of Euston his solitude had not been invaded.

They were timed not to stop before Rugby, and so very nearly two hours of quiet were secured to him.

Dr. Stone's journey had been so sudden, so utterly unpremeditated that he had never thought of providing himself with any comforts for the six hours that must elapse before he reached Holyhead.

His sole luggage was the bag he had taken to Bournemouth. He had dined in London, but of newspapers, flask of brandy, or any other substantial refreshment he was quite destitute.

However, Dr. Stone was quite satisfied. He took off his hat and tied his pocket handkerchief over his head, rolled himself up in his warm rug, and composed himself—not to sleep, but to think out his errand in Ireland.

He began to admit, as he reflected over it, that he really knew very little of Basil Lester. He had assisted at his birth and brought him successfully through oblique pox and scarlet fever. He had seen him grow from a child in frocks to a boy in Eton jackets, and from a rather awkward youth to a very promising young man; but all this told him very little of Sir Basil's real character.

As far as he could remember, they had not had a *tête-à-tête* since the Baronet was a school boy.

The young man might look on him as a mere machine for prescribing pills and powders, and

yet he was going alone and unaided to try and convince him his plighted wife was little better than an adventuress.

"I dare say he'll knock me down!" thought the old gentleman, dismally, "really in his place I should feel inclined to. I wish I had brought his mother with me, but she might have gone into hysterics and spoilt everything. It's as disagreeable a piece of work as I ever encountered, but what can I do? Putting his relations with Fenella Devreux out of the question, there's ample cause for me to speak to Sir Basil about his aunt's disappearance. It is incredible that the stout old party who couldn't write, and who loved to clean the plate and sit in the kitchen can be Miss Deborah—his aunt's mysterious disappearance is certain; as head of the family it's his duty to find her."

It seemed to Dr. Stone, as he thought over the complications in the Lester family, that Sir Basil's best plan would be to make friends with his uncle, and allow Percy Lester to pursue the quest.

The Baronet himself could not leave Ireland without endangering his situation, and it stood to reason that a member of the family would have more powers than a mere friend, or the doctor would have been quite capable of offering his own services.

To find Fenella—to have a personal interview with the old lady who at Ivy Cottage had been known as Miss Lester, this was the first step.

So much accomplished, it would be easy to wring from Fenella the fate of the real Deborah Lester, and then of course the engagement between the beautiful sinner and Basil must be broken off.

But supposing Basil Lester turned a deaf ear to his would-be saviour. Supposing he clung tenaciously to his faith in his *fiancée*, and wedded her out of hand as the best way of showing his trust in her, this would be a terrible state of things.

Poor Dr. Stone felt his hair almost stand on end at the very idea. Then there came to him a thrill of relief. He would constitute himself Sir Basil's guardian; if the young Baronet insisted on marrying at once, then he would obtain Fenella's address.

Supposing Deborah Lester to have died in January, all cheques issued since in her name were forgeries.

All had passed through Fenella's hands, so that she was at least implicated in the plot. Supposing Sir Basil remained infatuated, the old doctor would save him in spite of himself; if no other plan remained, the bride should be arrested on a charge of conspiracy. It was a strong measure, but would at least be effectual.

To make all these plans took time. Poor Dr. Stone was new to such arduous undertakings, and before he had mapped out his course clearly the train stopped more than once; but either it was still far from full or intending travellers were not attracted by the sight of the red silk pocket handkerchief in which the doctor had wrapped his head, for no one attempted to intrude upon him.

It was past midnight, and he began to feel both cold and tired. There was nothing more for him to do until he reached Holyhead.

However anxious he felt to begin his task of enlightening Basil Lester about Fenella, he could not do so until he stood on Irish ground. So feeling he had at least done something by making such careful plans, he drew his rug more closely about him and went to sleep.

There are people—and by no means the least worthy and able either—who, whatever difficulties beset them, can always wait patiently when they have once looked at the worst that could come of any failure.

This does not at all imply they take a gloomy view of things; on the contrary, such people generally look on the bright side, for when they have once decided what they would do if the worst came to pass they are so relieved that they at once become hopeful, and

go on their way peacefully and bravely until the crisis comes.

It was so with Dr. Stone. He had worried himself terribly at first with the idea Basil might not believe him, and so walk headlong into the trap Fenella had set; but the moment he reflected he could forcibly stop any marriage by arresting Miss Devreux on the charge of forgery and conspiracy he grew easier.

After all, he thought, Basil Lester had never seemed passionately attached to Fenella, and he would, at the worst, hardly marry without desiring an interview with her guardian, Miss Deborah, which desire would bring out all Dr. Stone wished.

The old man grew quite cheerful, and slept as peacefully as though he had been in his bed at home.

He awoke with a shiver. Who among us does not know the chill sense of discomfort with which we wake after sleeping in our ordinary day attire, the cramped feeling consequent on a night spent with our legs almost perpendicular, and the strange, unwelcome recollection that all toilet is at present impossible?

But Dr. Stone did not think of his toilet. He looked at his watch and found they were nearly due at Holyhead. His repose had been a brief one after all, and during its course some one had entered the carriage. He was no longer alone. In the corner farthest from him reclined something decidedly feminine, well wrapped up in a handsome fur-lined cloak.

The old doctor was naturally a courteous man. An invalid wife had perhaps made him extra thoughtful and attentive to her sex. The idea of any lady travelling alone at such an hour filled him with a kind of chivalrous pity, and when his lonely fellow-traveller rose and began to collect her little properties he at once offered to assist her.

She raised her face then and their eyes met. It was the woman he was travelling to Ireland to denounce Fenella Devreux.

The beautiful sinner and the only person who had dared to suspect her were alone together. The train was travelling at express speed. They were secure from all interruption. The man was old, and had lost something of his vigour. The woman was young, tall, muscular, and of surprising strength, add to which, she was quick enough to guess his errand, and to know he meant, if possible, to part her from her lover.

What could happen of such a meeting when one had so much at stake—and the other was alone?

(To be continued.)

OLD SARAH'S BARGAIN.

—O—

"PLEASE, Dora, will you give me a shilling?"

"What for, Flo?"

"Postage stamps. There isn't one left."

Dora Brooke shook her head.

"I'm awfully sorry, Flo," said she; "but, after all, postage stamps are a luxury. And what little money we have left must be hoarded for necessities."

Florence Brooke opened wide her porcelain-blue eyes.

"One would think we were bankrupt," said she, petulantly.

"So we are," gravely responded her elder sister. "All but thirty shillings. I've just been counting up our funds—and there is the oil shop account not paid, and five shillings at the grocer's! Don't whistle, Flo—it isn't lady-like."

"One must do something!" cried the beauty. "And I am so taken aback! Dora, what are we to do?"

"Economize," curtly answered the elder girl.

"We are always doing that!" But, even with the forced smile upon her lips, Florence burst into tears. "Oh, if you had only married Rex Hastings we never should have come to this!"

Dora coloured and bit her lip.

"It's of no use talking about that, Florence," said she. "We differed. That is enough."

"But, Dora, if you would hold up your finger he would come back to you."

"I never shall 'hold up my finger,' Flo, as you call it!"

"And he will never seek you unbidden."

But even through the diamond lenses of her tears, Flo saw that in the plain linen border of her sleeves her sister was wearing the tiny gold buttons, with centres of sparkling topaz, that had been Reginald Hastings's first gift to her. And she consoled herself that perhaps, some day, if ever they should meet, the chasm of the old quarrel might possibly be bridged over. Oh, if it only could! If!

"Dora," she cried, "Mrs. Jones hasn't come for the week's wash yet! What does she mean by neglecting us in this way?"

"I told her not to come, Flo. If we can't pay a woman for her day's work it is simple fraud to require it of her."

"But what shall we do?"

"I'm going to wash myself!"

Flo looked incredulously at the tall, slim brunette whose face and figure instinctively reminded one of "the lilies of the field, who toil not, neither do they spin."

"You don't know how," said she.

"I mean to learn."

"Dora, what nonsense! You can't."

Miss Brooke shrugged her sloping shoulders.

"It's you that are talking nonsense this time, Flo," said she. "If I've brains enough to master the differential calculus and go through logarithms at school, can't I learn an art in which even Mrs. Jones excels? I shall go and ask old Sarah to give me a point or two, and, hey, presto! the washing is done! The ironing will be mere play! Don't you remember the fun we used to have ironing our doll's clothes in the laundry years ago when—when we were a rich man's darlings?" And Dora resolutely bit her full scarlet lower lip to keep back the quiver in her voice.

"I am sure," said Flo, with dignity, "you must be joking!"

"No," calmly retorted Dora. "I never was more in earnest in my life. With a capital of thirty shillings, how much money do you think we can spare for washerwomen's bills?"

And, with the purpling glow of the sunset, Miss Brooke was standing under the honeysuckle-draped porch of old Sarah, the woman who had once been maid to her mother, and who now supported herself by laundry work.

"Come in, Miss Dora, and sit down," cried the old woman, with the effusive cordiality of her class. "The night of your's good for sore eyes. An' how's Miss Flo?"

"Flo is very well," said Dora, with a pre-occupied countenance. "Sarah, I want you to show me how to wash."

"How to wash! Miss Dora!"

"I'm in earnest, Sarah—I am, indeed! What do you do when you first begin?"

"Oh, goodness, miss! There's some things you can't put into words, anyhow," said the old woman. "You sit down an' you sorts out the clothes, an' you puts 'em in soak—not the flannels and woollens, mind—and you stirs up the starch, and you blues the water, and you runs 'em through the wringer, and—"

"Oh, stop—stop! Begin over again, Sarah, please," said Dora, feeling for her tablet and pencil.

"Why do you want to know, dear?" cried the old woman, abruptly.

"I'm going to do the family wash this week," calmly answered Dora.

Old Sarah put her arms akimbo: her bleared old eyes flashed with something of

their ancient spirit. The family pride was all up.

"No, you ain't, Miss Dora," said she. "Not while old Sarah's got the use of her hands!"

"I have no money to pay you, Sarah," explained Dora, who felt no false shame in confessing her straits to this ugly, kindly old creature who had held her on her knee as an infant many a time.

"Never mind," said Sarah. "Who said anything about pay? I think I see those little white hands in the starch and soapuds? No, no! Leave all that to me, and if you insist on paying me—"

"I can't, I tell you, Sarah!"

"Will you hear me out? If you're so proud you won't take no service from old Sarah, old Sarah will just change works with you. You shall mix me up one of them feather sponge-cakes you makes as well as your blessed mamma did afore you. Your fingers are light and soft enough to stir up a cake for the poor lady as is ill up at the yonder hotel. I promised it—she's a country lady, and thinks there ain't no sponge-cakes like private cooks make—but I didn't see my way to gettin' it done. So we'll change works, Miss Dora. Just fetch the clothes down here this evenin', and—"

Dora's face brightened.

"You are taking the lion's share of the work, Sarah," said she, "but that you always did. I'll run up to the house and make the sponge cake directly. Thank goodness, we've plenty of eggs and there's a good supply of flour and sugar yet in the kitchen cupboard. Who is the lady, Sarah?"

"Well, I declare the name's slipped out o' my head!" said the old woman. "But she was going to France with her nephew, and she was taken ill and couldn't git no further than the hotel. But she's on the mend now, they tells me."

And so the troubled question of the week's wash was settled for one week at least.

The sponge-cake was perfect—a golden bubble of lightness and sweetness—and Mrs. Danvers eat a slice of it slowly with her evening glass of cream.

"I wish I could get that old woman's recipe," said she, thoughtfully.

Her nephew looked at her with a smile.

"You are better, Aunt Marian," said he. "We can go on in a day or two."

At that moment the invalid's teeth struck against something hard in the yielding mass.

"What's this?" she cried. "A stone? Oh, I had nearly swallowed the thing! Why, Rex, look here—it's a sleeve button, set with a yellow topaz!"

Reginald Hastings looked at the little trinket, while the blood rushed hotly to his face. It was the same jewel that, three years ago, he had fastened in Dora Brooke's lace cuff, saying, jestingly: "See, darling it is a golden eye. If ever it looks at me, no matter where or when, I shall take it as a summons to come to you."

And, when he least expected it—when he supposed that summer romance of his life was gone and over—the summons had come.

He confided to his aunt the history of the gem. She was one of those delightful old ladies as full of romance as a school-girl, and declared that he should lose no time or pains in following up the clue.

"We quarrelled," he admitted, "and about the merest trifle in the world. I've always been ready to bite my tongue out when I remembered my mad folly—and when I sought a reconciliation she had left the neighbourhood, and I could nowhere find her address. But now—Oh, Aunt Marian, I am so thankful you didn't swallow the topaz."

"Me make that sponge-cake?" said old Sarah. "No, I didn't. I'm a tolerably good cook, but I ain't up to my young mistress in handling a sponge-cake, and I ain't ashamed to confess it! But the recipe's a family

secret. We don't give that recipe to any one. But if Miss Dora—"

"Miss Dora Brooke—yes, I know."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the old woman, holding up both her hands. "How did you know that was her name?"

"Will you oblige me with her address?" said Mr. Hastings, smiling.

So it happened that Dora, weeding out her bed of carnations in the cool of the evening, heard a familiar step on the grass-grown path, and turned, with a little involuntary cry, to look into the face of her lover.

"Her lover come back to her out of the beautiful Past."

"Oh, my love! my darling!" he cried, in a deep suppressed voice. "I have found you at last!"

The twilight had long died away; the yellow glory of the full moon was mantling the hedges as they parted.

"And I shall bring Aunt Marian to see you to-morrow—Aunt Marian, whom you would fain have fed on topaz and gold," said he, laughing, as he held her hand.

"I don't see how the button ever slipped out of my cuff," said Dora. "Yes, Rex, I did want you, but I was far too proud to call you back. Pride was always my besetting sin, you know. But I'll never be proud with you again."

"And I may keep the topaz button?"

"Yes, if you will let me keep its mate," she acquiesced.

And Flo nodded her head and declared that she did like a love story that ended satisfactorily.

THE SECRET WHICH PARTED THEM.

—X—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN Colonel Vivian recovered his senses he was lying upon the beach, and the sea was rising rapidly to high tide.

The sun, which had not reached its meridian when he arrived at Llanrocken Bay, was now in the West, by which he knew that he had lost the count of time for some hours.

He aroused himself to these facts slowly and heavily, till the remembrance came to him how near Viscount Venwood was.

Then the wild maddened blood surged through his stagnated veins once more. He started forward, but staggered like a drunkard.

He was ill, and he could not fail to be well aware of the fact, but nevertheless he could not subdue his desire for revenge.

He told himself the day of reckoning had come, and in the mood he was in he would have thought no more of taking the life of the Viscount than that of a mad dog.

With his heart full of bitterness he walked with uneven steps round the boundary of his wife's home to the front door, making his complaint as he went.

"Duped! Duped! So it was only to deceive me that she wrote those words, that she might with the greater ease and safety entertain her lover."

"Good Heaven! that a woman so young and beautiful should be so false—so cruelly deceptive!"

"What have I not suffered believing her dead? What tears of agony I shed upon yonder grave, where I believed she rested. Oh! the mockery of the whole business, and my pain and penitence have been for this dishonoured dishonourable woman."

He laughed bitterly, and entered the garden gate.

"This will be an unlooked-for surprise and interruption," he muttered, as he knocked and rang impatiently—so impatiently and suddenly as to cause Mrs. Martin to drop and

break the plate she was washing, which did not improve the good woman's temper.

She had never seen Colonel Vivian, and certainly his appearance at that moment was not prepossessing.

He had cut a small place upon his forehead when falling upon the beach, and the cut, small as it was, had bled, and marked his face and linen, and rendered him altogether unsightly, to say nothing of the expression of his features, which was at its very worst.

His fierce eyes glared at Lady Constance's servant as she opened the door and regarded this stranger in astonishment.

He was an unusual looking figure at a quiet and peaceful spot like that.

"Tell Viscount Venwood he is wanted," he said, roughly. "I will see him first, then her!"

"You cannot be sober!" retorted Mrs. Martin indignantly, and essayed to shut the door.

"Nonsense, woman, I am sober enough, do my bidding at once!"

There was such an air of authority in his tone that she could not tell what to make of him.

"Viscount Venwood has left," she said. "You cannot see him!"

"Left!"

He caught hold of the door post for support, and she saw that he was ill, not drunk as she had thought at first. So she fetched a chair and placed it in the porch for him, and then after some hesitation she brought him some brandy.

He drank it eagerly. It seemed to put fresh life into him.

"Lady Constance," he said, with a break in his voice, "I must see her."

Mrs. Martin began to feel very uncomfortable.

She determined that this man, whoever he might be, should not see her mistress if she could prevent it, and made her plans accordingly.

"Lady Constance is gone, too," she said. He started to his feet.

"When? and where? She was here just now."

"She went two or three hours since."

"With whom?"

"With the Viscount, to be sure. He will take care of her."

Again a livid hue overspread the Colonel's features.

"So he has again escaped me!" he muttered between his clenched teeth.

Then he turned to her with sudden energy.

"Give me their address," he cried, passionately. "I will pay you whatever you please for the information. I must know where to find them."

Mrs. Martin was a sharp woman, and she thought if a "white lie" would get rid of this dangerous-looking man it would be worth the telling, as she feared annoyance from him for her mistress.

"I can't take your money," she replied; "but if you have a mind to find the Viscount, go to Naples, to the chief hotel there, and you won't be disappointed."

And she went in and closed the door, listening attentively within for his movements.

He stood still for awhile, then she heard him mutter,—

"On the track!" and his uneven footsteps went out of the gate.

"Now, if she should meet him," soliloquised Mrs. Martin, "who knows what harm might come of it? I'll lock the house, and go and seek her."

And snatching the action to the words, she put on her bonnet and started without loss of time.

Colonel Vivian inquired whether he could get a conveyance, but found it was impossible, notwithstanding what he offered for it.

So he started off on foot the way he came,

therefore did not meet his wife, who had driven back to Llanrocken with the Viscount, left him to make his way to London, made some purchases in the town, and was returning home by the shortest road.

It was night by the time Colonel Vivian reached the town.

His dinner was burned up and spoilt, to the great discomfort of the old landlady, who had killed her most tender duckling for his meal.

He was so thoroughly ill that he could not get along at all, being obliged to sit down every few yards.

It was dusk, and he met no one by the way to assist him, and when he got back he would scarcely eat a mouthful, but started off by the night mail for London, then away again to Dover, across the Channel, through France to Italy.

Naples was reached at last, and every hotel was searched for Viscount Venwood and Lady Constance Vivian, but with no satisfactory result.

Colonel Vivian had most decidedly come on a wild goose chase.

He was very angry with Mrs. Martin, but in turn with the anger came the thought that they had possibly deceived her too.

In fact, it was most likely, for had his wife not most thoroughly duped him?

He clung to Naples. They might still come there, he thought; so he waited on.

While there, he made the acquaintance of Count Angelo, who invited him to his house.

There he saw, exquisitely framed in delicate Dresden china, the sketch which Leoni Angelo had sent to his kinsman of the woman he loved, little dreaming that she was another man's wife.

As soon as the Colonel's eyes fell upon it he knew that it represented Lady Constance.

Count Angelo was proud of that picture. It had been so very much admired, and he liked pretty women.

The Count had grown quite fond of his future niece from looking at the beautiful face.

When he saw the Colonel's intent gaze fixed upon it, he went forward to do showman, as he had done many times before.

"A country woman of yours, Colonel Vivian," he said, waving his hand towards the picture; "but about to become one of my own by adoption, I hope. You do not know my kinsman and heir, Leoni Angelo, I fancy, although his pictures have made a sensation in your capital."

"It is not to be wondered at that the boy should prove a painter; our name is well known in the world of art. Yea, Michael Angelo was of our blood, and we are proud of him."

"Of course—of course," interrupted the Colonel impatiently; "but that picture! where did you get it?" and his trembling hand was pointed towards it.

"You know the lady, perhaps?" continued the Count, looking at his agitation in surprise.

"A charming creature, I am told, and as good as she is beautiful."

A groan escaped from Colonel Vivian's lips. "Go on," he said, "let me hear all."

"There is not much to tell," replied the Count. "Merely this, that the lady is Lady Constance Caithness, the only daughter of the Earl and Countess of Caithness who were great friends of Leoni's mother."

"That makes a bond of union between the young people, of course, and, besides this, there is but little doubt that the boy has been of use to her. He is not one to land up his own actions, but I believe he saved her life. At any rate, he has been staying with her for a long time at Llanrocken Bay, and he is up to his eyes in love with her."

"I see," said the Colonel, "and the lady, is she equally in love with him?"

"It is to be hoped so for Leoni's sake," laughed the other. "It would be a terrible disappointment if she refused him, but I am sure he does not anticipate rejection. He is simply

devoted to her and thinks her perfection. You know the old saying, 'love begets love,' oh! the boy is all right. He is trying to unravel a little mystery which hangs over his life; that done he will bring his beautiful bride to Italy, I hope, to cheer my latter days."

"I, too, once believed that love could beget love, but now I know that it is not true. I am a man who has loved passionately, ay, madly, and I tell you the return I received was a cruel wrong and a heartless deception. You have only known me of late."

"Two years ago I was a young man. Now I am an old one before my time; I have passed through the fiercest fires. All the love which once lived within my heart has been scorched and burned into a wild hate. You look shocked, Count Angelo. You have possibly had but little to do with that madness which men call love—that insane craving to blend another life, another soul, another heart, another body into one with your own."

"If you have not felt this, you have not known love, nor can you comprehend hate. I have so loved, I do so hate. The worship of my soul has turned to gall."

"The woman I loved has deceived me, cruelly, wickedly, and made me the wreck I am."

"Do you wish the like blight to fall upon the life of your young relation? No, you cannot; so be warned in time, and save him from my fate," ended the Colonel passionately.

"I grieve for you, my friend," replied the other, in a tone of commiseration. "But there are women and women, and from all my kinsman tells me of Lady Constance Caithness he need fear no such treatment at her hands. I should, indeed, be sorry to warn him against the sex. I should be glad to see him married and happy."

"Married and happy! Great Heaven! Count Angelo, how am I to tell you my awful secret? There is no Lady Constance Caithness! The lady who your young relation loves, the woman he believes in, that girl with the beautiful face, is as false as she is fair. Yes! she is as cruel as hell itself!"

"Lady Constance Caithness married Colonel Clement Vivian more than two years ago. She is Lady Constance Vivian, my false and faithless wife; and if you desire to save Mr. Angelo from a fate worse than death we must start for England together immediately!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE excitement of Count Angelo to get off to his kinsman's rescue was both pathetic and absurd.

The old saying that there is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous would have been very applicable to him.

A Roman nobleman is one of the proudest of men, and the thought that one of his blood might accidentally make such a marriage affected him deeply.

The mystery which had enveloped the marriage of Leoni's mother had been a grit in the eye to him, and he had blamed her for her secrecy. But Leoni was ignorant of his danger, and innocent of this woman's cruel deception.

"If what you say is indeed true, Colonel," he exclaimed, impetuously, "I must start at once, and save him. Poor fellow, it will be a blow to him, for he believes in her with a great faith, and loves her with a fervent love."

"I grieve for him, but he will be a man, and act as a member of my family should. He will not forget that he is an Angelo," said the old man, with erect head. "And, poor lad, I will bring him back. He must comfort my old age alone. Unless," he added, "he can forget that too beautiful face. Colonel, I shall have some difficulty in doing so myself. I have grown to look upon her as a daughter."

He crossed the room, and taking the picture

from the wall, looked it up in a cabinet with a sigh.

"Are you returning to England?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes. I will see the end of all this," the Colonel replied, bitterly. "I have thought only to shield my wife's name until now, but if this is the use she makes of her freedom, to blight other lives besides mine, then I must speak, and save those unfortunates who, like myself, have trusted in her treacherous beauty."

The Count's servants could not think what had come to him.

It was years since he had left Italy, and now, with no notice at all, off he was going, with no retinue as of yore, but just his valet and no one else.

The suddenness of his departure made a great deal of talk among those who knew him of all classes, more especially as he was known to have gone with the morose and sombre-faced English officer, who had been hunting for some one unceasingly ever since his arrival at Naples.

Colonel Vivian at length began to think that it was a case of "like mistress, like maid," and that Mrs. Martin had taken him in, which really was the truth, although she had done it in more a spirit of mischief than anything else, without an idea of results from it of a serious nature.

But her simple words were yet to stir up a greater commotion than she dreamed possible could emanate from so humble a source.

Colonel Vivian and Count Angelo travelled to England as fast as the feeble state of the old nobleman's health would permit.

Their journey could scarcely be called a pleasant one by the most optimistic individual alive; for the Colonel was stern and silent, and his new friend anxious and fidgety.

London was reached at length, and the surprise of Leoni may be imagined when his studio door opened, and the Count and a stranger stood before him.

Leoni was occupied upon a life-sized picture of the woman he loved.

The earnest blue eyes looked out of the canvas with their own native sweetness.

It was a wonderful picture, a speaking likeness, and even as he stood, with his hand clasped in that of his kinsman, the Count could not withdraw his eyes from the portrait.

"I see you recognise it," exclaimed Leoni, with enthusiasm, having bowed with courtesy to the new comer, without so much as hearing his name, in his own double excitement.

"I see you recognise it, Count. Now, is she not beautiful? The little sketch I sent you did not do her justice. I am glad you grew to like it, and have given it a place of honour, and what is more, I hope that my time of probation may now soon come to an end."

"I heard from Lady Constance this morning. She has given me an introduction which both she and I feel sure will lead to great results."

"Who can tell me about a former Viscount Venwood, if not, the man who bears his name and title?"

An ejaculation broke from Colonel Vivian, who stood grasping the back of a chair, with an ashen hued countenance.

"Go on," he said. "Let me hear the end. Where are they? I insist on knowing."

His imperious manner aroused resentment in the artist's mind.

"Sir," he replied, haughtily, "my affairs can hold but small interest for you, who are a perfect stranger. I own to having erred in the matter of taste, when I allowed myself to be carried away by my feelings to speak of a lady before one whom I did not know. But my joy at seeing the Count again must be my excuse."

Then, turning suddenly, he linked his arm through that of his kinsman, and led him across the room.

"Come, look at my other pictures; then I

will take you over my flat. It is a cosy one. What do you think of my studio?"

"This is an unexpected pleasure to see you! I thought you were a fixture in Italy."

Colonel Vivian was watching Leoni intently. The likeness which had struck him before came to him afresh now. Leoni felt his scrutiny, and turned towards him.

"We are not strangers; we have met before," said the Colonel, suddenly.

"Indeed," replied the other. "You certainly have the advantage of me there."

"Do you belong to the Douglas family?" inquired the Colonel, abruptly.

"My dear Vivian," returned the Count, beginning for the first time to think it possible that his friend's brain might be turned, and that the whole story of his wife's fickleness might be an hallucination, "my dear Vivian, this is my young relative, Leoni Angelo. I thought you quite understood," he said, soothingly. "If there has been any mistake about what you told me, for Heaven's sake do not let us distress the boy over it. I came to England to save him, but—"

"There is no mistake. But he is like the cursed Douglasses, and he is not like you."

"Well, I flatter myself he is, you know," laughed the Count, good-humouredly. "He is dark enough for an Angelo."

"And for a Douglas," persisted Colonel Vivian. "He might be Viscount Venwood himself, only I will admit that he has a better and more open face."

Leoni started.

He began to be interested in the conversation.

There was a strange significance in this man's wild words.

"Do you know anything about Viscount Venwood?" inquired Leoni.

"Gott in Himmel!" broke out the soldier, bitterly; "did Nathan know David?"

"Well I should say he rather did!" answered Leoni, unable to repress a smile.

"And I know the accursed villain Stirling Douglas, Viscount Venwood. He is a second David. He robbed me of the wife I loved, who I believed loved me in return. The truth must be told at last, and Viscount Venwood has yet to answer to me for his treachery!"

Leoni Angelo saw now that this stranger was suffering from the sad excitement of sorrow, and he felt grieved for him, for his heart was a tender one.

He pushed a comfortable chair forward and pressed Colonel Vivian into it, and having shown the like attention to his relation, he walked to a cupboard and produced some wine.

"Your trouble is a great one," he said, as he handed a glass to the Colonel.

"All honest men must be sorry for you, and I regret that it is a matter of grave importance to me to make the acquaintance of such a man, but it is so; I must see him. Still, it will only be acquaintanceship, if he be such an one as you describe."

"I knew it, Leoni," cried the Count, grasping his hand. "I knew your love would never cause you to err, and that our family honour would be maintained in your person. It is hard on Colonel Vivian, and it is hard on you, but it would have been worse by far if it had gone on, and you had been entangled further—engaged, or even married; such things do happen."

"You speak in riddles, Count," replied Leoni with a bright look. "Yes! such things as engagements and marriages do take place sometimes, thank Heaven, and I hope you will hear of mine ere long."

"The saints forbid!" cried the Count, laying his hand upon his shoulder kindly. "My boy, you do not know what you are saying. That dream must be given up, and you shall return with me to Italy. There is no need whatever for you to earn your living; you can follow art for your own amusement. I have certainly enough for us both."

"My dream be given up!" repeated Leoni incredulously. "Not if I know it, Count!

Greatly as I value your friendship and affection, and the position you offer me as your heir and adopted son, I should consider them all as nothing if they must be weighed against my love. You speak before this gentleman, Count, so you oblige me to do the same, but remember that all my happiness depends upon the answer of Lady Constance when I ask her to be my wife.

"If she says 'yes' to me, there will be no more joyous fellow in existence; the whole world will sing a glad song to me. If 'no,'" he broke off suddenly, his whole look changed, the brightness died out and he appeared to become older before their eyes.

"Leoni, my boy, she must say 'no,'" said the Count brokenly, for he was touched by the genuine affection of his kinsman, and so, it seemed, was Colonel Vivian; for he was sitting with his face turned away and his hand was shading his eyes. "Indeed she must, you cannot tell what sorrow you are laying up for yourself."

"Ah! it would be sorrow indeed if she were to say that; but why should she? In the quiet and calmly life she leads so few pass who could win her heart from me," returned Leoni, with feeling.

"Quiet and saintly!" echoed Count Angelo. "She has bewitched you. Think no more of this beautiful, but far from pure, woman. Tell me how far these love scenes have gone."

"There have been no love scenes, as you are pleased to call them, and I would not let the expression pass, Count, from any other man but you, and as I am, grateful though I am to you, if my dear girl is not to receive a daughter's welcome from you, neither can I accept a son's."

"My idea of love is an utter stannousness towards that other who honours a man with her heart's affection. I will accept no kindness which is not also freely given to her whom I love," and Leoni stood with his head thrown back, looking so honest and open that the Count felt proud of him, and Colonel Vivian after gazing at him for some time let his head fall heavily forward upon his arms as they rested upon the back of an adjacent chair.

"I like you none the less for your words, Leoni, my poor boy, but you can never wed Lady Constance."

"That decision I will receive only from her lips!" said the artist proudly, "and if she so decides, Heaven help me to hear it!"

"It will help you, Leoni, for you have not done this wrong knowingly. She is to blame in the matter, and not you."

"What do you mean by blame? and what do you call a wrong?" he asked proudly, with a touch of indignation in his tone. "My love for Lady Constance is certainly the most ennobling feeling of my life."

"Colonel," said the Count, "What am I to say to him?—how can I explain? Cannot you help me? We must break his faith in this woman," and the old man's voice shook with agitation.

Colonel Vivian absolutely groaned, and for a time remained with his face buried in his hands.

Then he rose. There was a strange mixture of feeling upon his features.

He had come there meaning to include Leoni in his fierce hate, but he couldn't.

There was something in him so thorough and open that he could not help admiring even the unfortunate love which he felt for Lady Constance.

It was not like the love of most men now-a-days, but something better, truer, and more chivalrous.

It humbled him, for he saw that it was altogether nobler than his own.

There was then a softening of the hard face, a pity and compassion shining from the eyes which had looked so fierce, and there was something almost majestic in his look and gesture.

He looked as a dethroned king might do when surrendering his crown.

"Mr. Angelo," he said, "the Count is

right. We must break this faith of yours in—Lady Constance," and his voice broke pitifully. "In itself it is refreshing to see such faith. It is a rare plant now, and down in good soil it might have brought you joy. As it is—Count, I find it as hard to break his dream as you, and the more so as I have dreamed too. Why were women made?"

"To raise us into something beyond mere men, to show us the way to a better land," broke in Leoni in a low earnest voice. "I had a good mother and I hope to have an equally good wife."

"Hush!" whispered the Colonel in a strange awed whisper. "Not that word, boy! I cannot bear it! Lady Constance is my wife, and can never be yours!"

CHAPTER XXX.

LEONI ANGELO stood as one who had received a death blow—silent and still, his face pale as marble, his eyes fixed upon Colonel Vivian with a deep pain and horror in them.

"Your wife!" he exclaimed after a long pause, "I could have believed you better had you said your daughter."

"There is not ten years disparity between us, though possibly there may appear to be twenty or more."

"Ay, all that," returned Leoni dreamily. "I have suffered. A woman like that does not feel. She will wear well," said the Colonel bitterly.

The artist regarded him curiously.

"I understood you, sir, to speak of Lady Constance as your wife, but I must have been mistaken. Men love and cherish their wives, and shield them from the world, even with their lives, as mothers shield their babes. Their good names are dearer to them than their own honour. Had you a wife you would understand this freemasonry of love."

Hope was struggling once more to the fore in Leoni's heart.

He believed what he said. He only knew the best side of life, and would have been a worthy member of King Arthur's round table.

"Leoni," said the Count, "your ideas are right, but, my boy, the world has gone wrong, and what ought to be seldom is. Husbands and wives are, I fear seldom on the terms you picture."

"We were, before that villain stepped between us!" cried the Colonel passionately. "No couple ever lived a more blissful and perfect life."

"I do not understand," said Leoni. "With such a close love as you describe, there could be no room for any one to step between. When that happens, it shows that the couple have not kept close together. I would defy any one to come between us if I were married to the woman of my love!"

A bewildered look crept into the soldier's eyes. He grew uncomfortable.

"I can only speak of my own love," he said. "Here was doubtless deception all through."

"Then there must be some error," returned Leoni firmly. "We cannot be speaking of the same lady. Lady Constance is incapable of deception, believe me. Her eyes shine as clear and bright as the stars in the Heaven above us. No one with a heart could doubt her. The sweet calm of her manner speaks of some great sorrow which has been lived through and from which she has come out purer for the furnace fires."

"You have only to ask the poor about her to hear what she is. They quickly know, and they have named her the good lady! I repeat—she is incapable of deception."

"And yet she has passed herself off to you as a single woman," cried the Colonel scornfully.

The blood rushed in a flood over Leoni's pale face.

"If you are in truth the husband of such a noble woman, you are altogether unworthy of

her," he said with a stern gaze. "Good Heavens, if you had won such a prize, why did you not cherish it, and give to her the love which her gentle nature requires? Instead, you leave her to lead an isolated existence, and, in fact, I fear I am not wrong in saying she had had to earn her daily bread. Oh! if she had been entrusted by providence to me instead of you, Colonel Vivian, no one should have come between us I promise you!"

"I should look upon your story as the tale of a madman but for one or two things which make it bear in with truth upon me. Firstly, that she has suffered I know. Secondly, she points under the name of Constance Vivian. Thirdly she signs herself so, although I confess that it struck me merely as her professional cognomen."

"Our acquaintance was begun without an introduction. I met her first in a railway carriage, when she was travelling alone from the North to London."

"Ah! I knew we had met before," broke in the Colonel. "I remember you now. You are wrong; she was not alone. I was with her; but I got out a station after you joined us."

And his brow darkened as he spoke.

"She seemed so perfectly satisfied by your company that mine was not needed."

"There was a gentleman in the carriage, and he did get out; but I do not recognise him in you."

"Possibly not. Trouble has altered me," he returned, doggedly. "No man could go through what I have done without feeling it, and showing the traces of his mental agony. Yes! I left her there in your company because I had found out that she was false to me, and I have never seen her fair face since, although Heaven having no pity, I have heard her voice."

"Mr. Angelo, I see you are a man who could love well. Do not waste your affection upon this worthless woman. I would say to you, remain single. Women in general are weak even when they are not wicked. You are better without them; for one joy they cause a dozen pains. But I suppose it is useless for me to preach. Men must purchase their wisdom, and, unfortunately, it is but too dearly bought."

Leoni seemed scarcely to follow his words. He was still in spirit with the poor young wife who had been deserted in his very presence.

He now began to understand the pallor and the trembling lips which he thought had come from pain alone. And this man before him said she had not suffered!

"Colonel Vivian," exclaimed Leoni, indignantly, "if you could leave a beautiful woman like Lady Constance alone with a man you knew nothing of, at a moment when she must have known that you cared no longer for her, and yourself believing her a weak woman, I am sorry for her from the bottom of my heart, for, whatever followed in her life, I should blame you, and not her."

"Every woman's husband should be her lover too, and if he is not so, he invites some other fellow to fill the post; and if no one has done so in the case of your wife it is only because the purity and proud reserve of her nature has kept back all avowals of love from the lips which longed to speak them."

"I understand it all now; her friendship and her gratitude were mine, and it was her knowledge of her own position which caused the restraint and barrier between us. I, with my heart full of love for her, never dreamed of this. I thought that it was my lack of an assured position which troubled her. This was what she meant—this was why she would not let me come again, or write to her, unless we could in any way really help one another."

"This concession she made because she considers she owes me her life; would to Heaven it was my pleasant task to cherish it," he ended, brokenly.

"Never shall I forget her as the tender nurse who watched over me during those days



["I SEE YOU RECOGNIZE THE PICTURE, COUNT," LEONI SAID, ENTHUSIASTICALLY. "IS SHE NOT BEAUTIFUL?"]

when I so nearly died at her house. Bitter as my disappointment is, I can in no wise blame Lady Constance. She never spoke of herself as free. With this new light thrown upon the subject I can fully understand many things she said then.

"I have lost the prize I covet most on earth, but Lady Constance has still a friend in me! I will allow no one to say one word against her—not even you, Colonel Vivian; nor have I the faintest belief in her being false to you! Truth is imprinted on the smooth, white brow.

"I would as soon believe my mother impure, as her, whom I love with all my heart, and to whom I would gladly have trusted my life's happiness."

"Those are somewhat cool words to Lady Constance's husband," said the Colonel, eyeing Leoni curiously. "You have strange dash and courage. I cannot but admire you for your audacity."

"Is it audacity to believe a woman innocent until her guilt has been proved to you? No; however much appearances may have gone against Lady Constance, I believe in her still—ay, and would, knowing her as I do, believe her innocent, even if she proclaimed herself guilty! I should say that sorrow had turned her mind against herself, but that her nature could not err from its innate purity."

"Leo, you are a noble youth!" cried the Count; "and a woman who can inspire such a love as yours, my boy, cannot be all bad."

"All bad!" replied Leoni, hotly. "I tell you she is all good—good as the angels above. You shall see her for yourself before you leave England. My golden dream is over. She will never know what my wild love has been for her. But she shall learn the value of my friendship."

"I will be her faithful champion, and when she learns that I know her position, and that she need fear nothing from me, she will

yield me her friendliest feelings, I know, and if I can clear her name from the stigma laid upon it by the man who should have kept the faintest breath of slander from tarnishing it, I will."

"You have, then, constituted yourself her champion!" said the Colonel, with a grim smile.

"I have, if she will accept my help."

"What? When her love is given to Viscount Venwood?"

Leoni fairly started.

He remembered her agitation at the Viscount's name, but he was loyal even then.

"The accusation is false!" he replied, passionately. "I would stake my life upon her honour!"

"Your faith is great," said the Colonel, mockingly.

"Had your's been the same, Colonel Vivian, the life of bliss you spoke of as having enjoyed with Lady Constance would not have now been a thing of the past, but a present joy. I can only ask how *dared* you doubt such a woman? How could you venture to accuse her of wrong doing? She so pure and sinless; and you a man! Our lives are so different to theirs, so much more of the earth earthy."

"By Jove! you are a champion indeed! Why, you have used some of her *very words*!" exclaimed the Colonel excitedly.

"She denied her supposed guilt, then?"

"Of course she did."

"And you doubted her word?"

"How could I do otherwise? I had heard and seen enough to condemn any woman I could not doubt if I believed myself sane?" he ended bitterly.

"Then Colonel Vivian," cried Leoni Angelo, "I would believe myself *insane*, and I would go straightway to the woman I had insulted with my disbelief, and acknowledge my fault,

kneeling at her feet; I would entreat for her pardon and her love once more.

"I would show her that I trusted her fully, and leave it to her to love to explain what had troubled me and made me insane enough to doubt her truth."

"You would, in fact, have a man the woman's slave!" said Colonel Vivian.

"On the contrary," replied Leoni proudly. "I would have him a man and not a slave to the jealous imaginations of an unstrung mind. I am truly sorry for your wife."

"And if all you say of her is true, my boy, so am I," cried the Count, patting his relation approvingly upon the back, "and, by Jupiter! she shall have another champion. I'll help her too. Colonel, we will bring you face to face with your own bogies!"

(To be continued.)

HERE is a Chinaman's description of the London Fire Brigade, which will interest, and perhaps surprise, Captain Shaw and his subordinates. The engines, to begin with, are nothing less than "water dragons, that save from fire!" "When the electric call to a firesound," says the eloquent Celestial, "at the first stroke of the bell the apparatus moves of itself, and the boards on which the drivers are sleeping then and there stand upright; the boards being upright, the men are standing, and, even, if asleep, must be aroused. One turn of the body, and the uniform, clothes, and hats, are on their backs and heads; a further movement of the hand, and the saddles and bridles descend of themselves upon the horses' backs without further trouble. A match is struck, and the coal blazes up. Not more than a minute has passed, yet they are already on the move, and wielding the whip, hastening with all speed to the scene of the fire!"



"THEN YOU WILL MAKE ME HAPPY, NINA," SAID KEITH. "YOU WILL BE MY WIFE?"

NOVELLETTE.]

MRS. DAWSON'S LODGINGS.

—C—

CHAPTER I.

SIR GERALD ANSTRUTHER was a baronet of old family and large fortune, the cheeriest companion, the pleasantest host, that you could have met with within fifty miles, but he was a bachelor.

It had puzzled a great many people to guess the reason he had avoided matrimony since he was a man of eminently domestic tastes, and had a decided penchant for womankind.

The simple truth of the matter was his wealth and honours had not come to him till he was hard on fifty. The painful restrictions of genteel poverty had pressed on him so severely up till then that he had been quite unable to afford a wife. At forty-seven he decided he was too old.

"I daresay there were plenty of girls would have accepted me," he remarked, simply, to his nephew one winter's night when they sat talking over their wine, and he had been betrayed into speaking of the past, "that is, would have accepted the name of Lady Anstruther; but there wasn't one of 'em would have loved me. I had no fancy for buying a wife, and so you see I kept single. Your mother made me very happy while she was alive, and I think I'm pretty nearly as fond of you, Keith, as though you'd been born my own son. I haven't had any of the dreariness and neglect which is supposed to encompass forlorn bachelors. And, take it altogether, my boy, I'm pretty well satisfied with what my sixty years have brought me."

The baronet made this speech when he had enjoyed his honours some thirteen years, and his gentle sister had been dead about half that time.

Lucy Anstruther had married a young officer, who left her a widow early.

She had been very thankful for a home with her brother, and a start in life for her son, even though Gerald prefaced his invitation with a warning his nephew Keith must not regard himself as his heir.

To do Keith Rossiter justice, he never had counted on inheriting his uncle's fortune, though, as Sir Gerald had no other relation, he might well have done so.

The entail on the Anstruther estates ended with Sir Gerald. He was perfectly free to leave his property as he would.

It had come to him unexpectedly from a distant cousin, who had been powerless to will away a penny of the revenues or income of the estates.

Sir Gerald, on the contrary, could have bequeathed the whole to found an asylum for the insane, and no one could have said him nay.

Keith was a boy at school when his mother accepted her brother's invitation to preside over his home. He was seven-and-twenty now, a handsome, thoughtful-looking man, with dark eyes and clearly cut, regular features.

Keith was a barrister by profession, and had been duly called to the bar, but he was not likely to see any briefs for years to come. However, as he enjoyed free quarters at his uncle's house, and a very liberal allowance from the baronet to supplement his slender patrimony, his briefless state hardly caused him any serious inconvenience.

"I made my will yesterday, Keith," said Sir Gerald, slowly, as though anxious to impress his nephew with the importance of the subject. "I expect a great many people think you will be my heir, but—there were other claims on me. Fortunately the baronetcy becomes extinct, so you won't be troubled by a mere empty title."

Keith looked up thoughtfully. He had

been told again and again he would not inherit his uncle's wealth, and, to do him justice, he was not mercenary, but he possessed his full share of curiosity.

He knew Sir Gerald had not another relation but himself, and so it did puzzle him a little to guess what "claims" there could possibly be on the baronet.

He had once upon a time speculated as to the chances of his uncle having contracted an early improvident marriage, and quarrelled with his wife, but Sir Gerald's latest confidence seemed to contradict even the idea of such a thing.

His uncle watched him curiously. He did not like the young man's silence.

"You've no right to think yourself aggrieved, Keith. I always told your mother my intentions."

Keith brought his hand down on the table with a bang.

He was annoyed, not at his uncle's communication, but at the suggestion he felt aggrieved.

"If you gave away every shilling you possessed, Sir Gerald, I should have no right to complain. I owe you years of a kind, pleasant home, a good education, and a fair start in my profession. I assure you I never expected more."

Sir Gerald fidgetted with his wine glass.

"I should like to have left you all I had, I should, indeed, Keith, but you see my word's gone. I've been thinking over it a lot lately, and I believe I see a way by which you may yet reign here when I am gone."

"You'll live another thirty years yet, I hope, sir," said Rossiter cheerfully. "You come of a race given to making old bones."

"Perhaps! But I'm sixty turned, and it was better to see to things. I should like to tell you all about it, Keith, and why I've left my property away from you."

Mr. Rossiter put up his hands in despair.

"I will listen to anything in the world but please uncle let that subject drop."

The story was a very simple one, and it had an air of pathos in it. More than twenty years before, when Gerald Anstruther was a mere clerk at two hundred a year, and working tolerably hard to enjoy that he had a friend whom he loved as a brother. His sister Lucy was married, and gone abroad with her husband. He was almost alone in the world, and he clung to George Dugdale with all the tenacity of a heart not given to your itself out in many affections.

Mr. Dugdale received the offer of a post abroad, and being a married man accepted the chance of advancement eagerly. There was a sad parting between the friends, and strong up to real emotion. Gerald Anstruther took a solemn oath that if he died unmarried he would leave all he possessed to his friend's children.

It was a strange oath, but at that time many lives stood between him and the Anstruther property. It was not to be expected he could have more than a few hundreds—it so much to leave. George Dugdale had been to him dearer than a brother. He was a domineering, visionary man much given to gloomy forebodings and had been howling in Gerald's hearing the poverty which would certainly be his children's lot. He had two already, and a third expected.

He went to America with his wife and children. Little more than a year later Mrs. Dugdale wrote to tell Gerald Anstruther of her husband's death. She had never been a favourite with him, and was quite in ignorance of his vow, and also of the fact that, poor though he was at present, he belonged to a rich and powerful family. Her letter was essentially of the kind called "begging." She enclosed a few lines from her husband written on his death-bed, and hinted very plainly a five pound note would be more acceptable than the most fervent condolences.

Anstruther unfastened the little note penned by his friend's hand. It seemed to him almost a message from the grave. It was very short, and very simple, only saying that the little boy had died on the voyage out, the baby was born dead, so there was but one child left on the mother's hands, and for her George Dugdale implored his friend's care, if ever she came to England, would Gerald be kind to her; when his own time came to die would he remember his promise, and try to provide for his godchild's future.

"She must be twenty, turned, by this time," said Sir Gerald, looking at his nephew rather helplessly. "I declare I never thought how the years were running on until I came to make my will, and then this plan occurred to me. I really think, Keith, it is quite an inspiration."

"You haven't told me what it is yet," objected Keith, who did not quite like the eagerness of his uncle's tone.

"Well, you see, I am bound to leave Geraldine Dugdale (they called her after me) all I have. Cameron tried to make me think the old oath was not binding on me, but—"

"Of course it is binding," said Keith, seeing the old man waited for some reply from him.

"I was sure you would say so. Well, Keith, Cameron and I both think it is high time Geraldine came back to England and learned a little of the position she will have to fill. He is going to make all inquiries, and he thinks she may be discovered in three months."

"I hope she may."

"And, Keith," went on Sir Gerald, a little uncomfortably, "she is sure to be a nice girl; her father was the noblest man I ever met."

"And her mother?"

"Her mother was odious!" confessed Sir Gerald; "but, of course, she won't take after her."

"After being under her sole influence for so long, I should think it probable."

"I believe you are trying to annoy me, Keith."

"Not in the least, uncle. Well, in three months time you think Miss Dugdale may be found? I suppose you will install her at once as the heiress of Anstruther Park?"

"She is quite young, Keith," said the baronet, speaking very fast, and without a single stop, as though he were afraid of interruption, "not more than two-and-twenty at the most; and, you know, it is high time you married; and five years is just the right difference between husband and wife. You are very dear to me, Keith, I can't bear the idea of your being a poor man, and this plan settles everything."

"What plan, uncle?"

Sir Gerald glanced at Keith's obtuseness.

"Harry Geraldine Dugdale, and you and she can reign together at Anstruther. She must be a nice girl, Keith; and, really, it's time you thought about settling."

Keith smiled.

"You have the kindest heart in the world, sir, and I'd do a great deal to please you; but I can't agree to this, even for you."

"Why not?"

"I have no particular wish to marry at all, and I am old-fashioned. I believe in love."

"Why shouldn't you fall in love with Geraldine?"

"Love doesn't come to order."

"You might try."

Keith had hard work not to laugh, his uncle's tone was so discomfited.

"Unfortunately I have a great objection to heiresses, sir. I could never bring myself to marry any woman richer than myself; and I don't quite like what you tell me of Mrs. Dugdale."

"Keith, you are behaving absurdly!" said the baronet, testily.

"Very likely the young lady is married already," suggested his graceless nephew. "I believe they do such things early in America."

"Will you promise me to give the matter your careful consideration?"

Keith shook his head.

"I can't. My mind is quite made up. The heiress is quite safe from all annoyance from me. I assure you, sir, I never counted on your wealth. I shall never pose as an injured rival before Miss Dugdale."

In vain Sir Gerald attempted to move him. The young barrister kept perfectly firm.

Then Sir Gerald, who for years had never had a whim ungratified, grew positively angry.

He raged and stormed; finally he ventured so far as to reproach Keith for his ingratitude, and to throw past favours in his teeth.

The next moment he regretted the step, for Keith Rossiter was desperately proud.

There was no quarrel. He did not even seem out of temper. He only said that if his uncle could remind him of his benefits, it was high time they should cease.

He would move into lodgings that very day, and leave Sir Gerald's house free for its future mistress.

In vain the baronet expostulated.

A little reflection showed Keith his resolve, though taken in pique, was really prudent.

"The sooner I leave off going through the world under false pretences, uncle, the better for me. I really am a poor man, and its time people knew it. I have a hundred a year of my own, I can pick up a little by my pen. I daresay I shall manage to make both ends meet."

"Of course I shall continue your allowance even if you persist in deserting me."

"I am not deserting you, uncle. I will come to you at any time you need me, only I have my way to fight in the future, and I think it is time I began the battle."

"You won't leave to-night?" pleaded Sir Gerald.

"I'll stay another week or so. Sir, shall I give you a word of advice. In your place I should go to America myself."

"Good gracious! What for?"

"Because you are the person most inter-

ested. No clerk whom Cameron sent could have the matter so much at heart as yourself. You would be able to recognise Mrs. Dugdale, and explain your intentions to her, and perhaps escort your protégée to England."

Sir Gerald looked round his handsome dining-room which he had filled with home comforts. He gave a sigh of regret.

"I believe you're right, Keith; and there's another thing, I should be moped to death here without you, and maybe all the world would say we had quarrelled."

"I don't mind what people say, but if you really think you should miss me that is another argument in favour of the American journey."

His advice was taken. There was not the slightest suspicion of any breach between Sir Gerald and his nephew.

The baronet went to America very soon, even Mr. Cameron never suspected, when a week later he heard Mr. Rossiter was settling in bachelor lodgings, that it was anything more than a temporary arrangement for the time of his uncle's absence.

"You'd better come and stay with us till you find quarters to suit you," he said, genially. "I can't tell you, Mr. Rossiter how concerned I am at your uncle's strange freak."

Keith accepted the invitation for a week, and said, thoughtfully, speaking of Sir Gerald,—

"I only hope he won't be taken in. You see, Mr. Cameron, my uncle in some things is as simple as a child. He is sure to tell his errand to America to every one he meets, and may have a dozen young ladies claiming to be his friend's child."

Mr. Cameron frowned.

"Well, the true Miss Dugdale will give you as much trouble as a false one. It's ten to one she's married in a humble rank of life, and never expected so much as a bank note from her father's old comrade. Sir Gerald says he must keep his oath, but to my mind the keeping of it's just madness and a real injustice to you."

Keith shook his head.

"I expect Sir Gerald will have a good deal of trouble about it, but I think he's right to keep his word. There's something to my mind very noble in a man's going to so much trouble just to redeem a promise no one could make him fulfil—it's my idea of honour."

"And the nobility's at your cost. You're much too romantic for this work-a-day world, Mr. Rossiter, you'll find it doesn't pay."

Keith looked at his old friend with a strangely earnest expression in his dark eyes.

"I think it's just in this work-a-day world one needs romance, Mr. Cameron. Rich folks have plenty of pleasant facts. Poor ones wouldn't have much bright to think about if they didn't weave a thread of romance into their sordid lives."

"And you're a barrister?"

"Yes—shall you think me too mad even to give me a brief, Mr. Cameron?"

"Oh come, Sir Gerald will make you a handsome allowance even if he finds the girl. No need for you to work."

"Every need!" said Keith, slowly. "I shall never take another penny of allowance from my uncle. The moment I heard of his promise to George Dugdale I made up my mind for the future, I must stand alone!"

"Then you must give up romance," observed Mr. Cameron, "for it doesn't pay."

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Dawson lived in Camden Town, and made a very uncertain living by letting lodgings.

There were times when the "card" remained in her window for weeks together, while the tradespeople grew impatient, and the widow hopeless; but just at the eleventh hour when things looked at their lowest ebb, a

tenant would turn up, and the Dawson family once more succeeded in that truly difficult task of keeping their heads above water. Stock's terrace was a very respectable street, frightfully dull, and depressingly quiet; but though most of the hundred odd houses let lodgings, it was seldom any swindler or bad character took up his quarters there; the terrace was unaffected by city clerks and daily governesses.

The dingy, semi-detached houses, and the strip of faded grass plat before the door, known as "front garden," seemed to have a special attraction for these.

No one in the terrace was very rich. Most of the householders, indeed, had to make spasmodic efforts to get together their quarter's rent, but for all that a midnight fitting, or a visit from the sheriff's officer was quite unknown there.

It was a November day. The sky had that peculiarly leaden hue known to experienced eyes as the forerunner of a fog. It was bitterly cold, but there was a heavy feeling in the air, making one feel dull and listless.

Mrs. Dawson and her eldest daughter looked both, but the atmosphere had very little to do with their appearance.

It was three months turned since the last lodger had departed. No one had even gone so far as to inquire the terms. Mrs. Dawson had advertised again and again. She had a card, recommending her apartments, displayed at the local stationers, and yet no one came, and, meanwhile, the seven children had to be fed and clothed. The expenses went on just the same, and it really seemed to Mrs. Dawson and Nina that unless help—that is to say a lodger—came soon, they should all be in the workhouse.

They were having a desperate consultation as to ways and means, for the mother had changed her last half-crown. The baker's man had just refused to continue the supply of bread, and, taken altogether, their circumstances looked even more deplorable than the weather.

Mrs. Dawson had been a pretty woman once, and she still retained sufficient good looks to make one wonder what she had been like before trouble lined her face and streaked her hair with grey.

Sorrow ages early; she was not much past forty, and yet seemed quite elderly. Nina was not in the least like her. Her mother's comeliness had been in the pink and white dairy-maid style of prettiness. The daughter's face, though pale and sad, had a refinement and delicacy which looked out of place in Stock's terrace. Whatever Nina Dawson put on suited her. Her features were too irregular for beauty, but there was a charm in her dark blue eyes and thick long, black lashes—a something about the wavy brown hair and broad open forehead which won upon people strangely.

The rough servant girl who waited upon the Dawsons would have given warning long ago only she couldn't bear to leave Miss Nina.

The landlord had more patience with Mrs. Dawson than any of his other tenants, because her daughter's face touched him and made him pitiful.

But the widow herself, strange to say, had no great affection for the slight graceful girl who was so useful to her.

There were five years between Nina and her brother Tom, who was the mother's darling. Tom was away at sea, but any one of the six little girls who came after him was dearer to Mrs. Dawson than Nina.

There were times when she almost hated her firstborn, who had never given her an hour's sorrow in her life.

Nina was pretty well used to it by this time. Her father had been different. A kind, warm-hearted man, who was always going to make a fortune and yet never done it, who flew into a passion one minute and repented almost to tears the next. A very weak character, no doubt, but Nina had loved him dearly, and had sorrowed bitterly for his loss.

She never quite understood what he died of. She was the only one of the children old

enough to remember that dreary time. She was just turned twelve, and Tom, a little mite of seven, when Mr. Dawson was taken ill, and they were sent away to somewhere in the country. They stayed three months, and then an old lady with a kind face came to fetch them home, and said they would never see papa again, and they must be good children and never mention him to their poor mamma.

When they got home they found twin babies had arrived, and their mother looked ten years older.

She would never mention her husband's name or let the children. Some one—Nina fancied it was the kind old lady—paid all the bills, and got No. 47, Stock's terrace, ready for them, and there they had lived ever since.

The first few years had not been so difficult; a "friend" (again Nina's thoughts went to the old lady) paid the rent, and sent them handsome presents, even paying all the expenses of getting Tom into the merchant service, but death had removed this help, and for the last two years the Dawsons had depended entirely on their lodgers, and a tiny annuity of fifty pounds a year which her father had left the widow.

Poor Nina thought of plans till her head ached. Tom was thousands of miles away. His earnings for years would keep only himself. Nina would gladly have gone out as a governess, but in that case, if lodgers had come, who would have seen to their comfort? The rough servant girl needed constant supervision.

The next sister to Nina was what her mother called "sensitive," but the neighbours in plainer language, styled "half-witted." After her came a cripple. The four younger ones were sharp enough, but Alice was only just turned twelve, Georgina eleven, and the twins ten. The mother's time all went in attending to the two afflicted ones. If Nina went out as a governess all hope of lodgers was at an end.

"Why do you sit there like a statue?" demanded Mrs. Dawson, she was very much out of temper, and never spared Nina on such occasions. "Why don't you think of some way out of our trouble?"

"We might send away Betsy," suggested Nina, a little hopelessly. "I daresay if you let Alice and the children help I could manage to do the work."

"I won't hear of such a thing! My children shall not be turned into drudges. I wonder you dare to suggest it, Nina!"

Nina might have suggested she was one of the children herself, but she knew by experience it was no use arguing with her mother.

"Could you write to any one?" she asked, timidly. "Is there any one who would lend us a little money?"

"No one," said Mrs. Dawson, tartly. "Poor people don't make friends, child!"

The change from the half-crown which Betsy had just brought in lay on the table, two silver coins and a few coppers. Nina glanced sadly at the little heap. It would barely provide their food for the day, since every crumb must be paid for, what was to become of them on the morrow?

She looked round the room.

"Could we sell something?" she suggested timidly. "I know you won't like the idea, mamma, but I can't think of anything else."

"There's those trinkets of yours," replied her mother, quietly. "You can sell them if you like."

"My gold necklace!" there was just a touch of regret in the girl's voice. It had been given her years before by the father she missed so much. "Perhaps I had better. There seems no help for it."

Mrs. Dawson brightened perceptibly.

"I told Charlie it was an absurd thing to buy for a child of five," she said, mentioning her husband's name to Nina for the first time since his death, "but he was set on it. You never saw such a fuss as he made over you.

You'd better put your things on and go to Regent-street. If you take it to the shop where it was bought they'll give you a fair price for it."

"Shall I take the children with me?"

"You have no sense!" retorted Mrs. Dawson, amiably. "Can't you see there's a fog coming on. I'll give you twopence, then you can take a 'bus to Charing-cross; it's no distance after that."

Nina came downstairs dressed in her well-worn blue serge and thin cloth jacket. She had the necklace in a little reticule on her arm. Mrs. Dawson handed her twopence rather grudgingly, and she set out.

She took the omnibus to Charing-cross, and soon found the jeweller's shop. The master a pleasant, kindly-spoken man, who recognized a lady, even in shabby garments, examined the necklace civilly, and told her it had originally cost six or seven pounds, but she was not likely to obtain more than half that sum as the pattern was quite out of fashion. He himself never purchased second-hand articles, but he would give her a line of introduction to a person in the Strand who dealt in such things if she liked. It was coming on very foggy, he would advise her to take a cab.

Poor Nina! She could not tell the prosperous shopkeeper she was penniless, she only thanked him and hastened on. By dint of many inquiries and much patience, she found the shop recommended to her; but the proprietor was very different to the kindly man in Regent-street.

Two pounds was his offer; not a penny more, he said bluntly; she could take it or leave it. The thought of the empty larder and no less empty purse at home made Nina consent. She took the two sovereigns and stepped out once more into the street; but she had been detained some time, and the fog had grown so dense she could hardly see a yard in front of her.

Nina, weary and heartsick, faint from a long walk taken on insufficient food, was in no state for an emergency which would have puzzled the sharpest wits. She took the wrong turning at Charing-cross, and instead of steering for Tottenham Court-road she wandered towards Piccadilly. There in crossing the road she felt a sudden shock, a whizzing sound as of wheels, then all was still, and Nina remembered nothing more.

When she came to herself she was in the sitting-room behind a confectioner's shop, and a young lady with a very coquettish apron and a still more coquettish fringe curled low on her forehead, was holding a smelling-bottle to her nose.

"You'll soon be all right now," said this damsel, kindly; "but you've had a narrow escape. If the gentleman hadn't rushed after you, you must have been knocked down."

Nina heard later that she had attempted to cross the road almost in front of a handsome cab, and that a gentleman on seeing her danger had rushed to the rescue and dragged her literally from under the horse's hoofs. He had saved her life at the risk of his own, and now growing alarmed at her long faint he had gone off for a doctor.

Nina felt ready to sink into the earth. She was grateful for all the kindness shown her, but how was the doctor to be rewarded?

He came in then, an old man, with a kind, fatherly face, examined her arm, which had been knocked against the shafts of the cab, asked a few other questions and then walked off, telling her to bathe the arm in cold water, and if still painful to keep it in a sling.

Nina managed some question about payment, but the young lady with the ringlets shook her head.

"He won't think anything about that," she said, confidently. "Why, he was just passing, and it didn't take him a minute. If you're well enough hadn't I better call the gentleman in? You'd like to thank him?"

Nina saw a tall, resolute-looking man, with dark eyes and a strangely thoughtful smile.

Keith Rossiter thought the girl he had rescued from the jaws of death had the sweetest face he had ever seen. He received her simple thanks very quietly, telling her he had done nothing to deserve them. He had been very much alarmed at her long faint, and now wanted to send for her friends, as he was sure she was not fit to go home alone.

"Oh, I am quite well now," said Nina, gratefully, "and, indeed, I need not trouble you."

"It would be no trouble."

"Mamma could not come," explained Nina. "She would not leave the children alone, and she could not bring them in this fog."

Keith smiled. He was thinking she looked very much like one of "the children" herself.

"Then you must let me see you home. I am sure you are not fit to go alone."

"I could not trouble you. I live at Camden-town, and it is a long way off. I think I must have lost my way. I was trying to get into the Tottenham Court-road."

"You must have gone wrong at Charing-cross. But I am an idle man, I mean I have nothing to do this afternoon, so you must really let me see you safely home."

Nina blushed crimson.

"Is it really afternoon now?"

"It is nearly three o'clock."

"But it was only twelve when I was in the Strand—and I walked straight here."

"You probably went up and down over the same road. It often happens in a fog one walks miles, so to say, in a circle. But if you live in Camden-town you need have no scruples about accepting my escort, for it happens I have business there, and should have gone to see about it this morning except for the fog."

He had evidently settled the confectioner's claims very much to their satisfaction, for the young lady with the ringlets sent for a cab and saw them into it with a beaming face.

Nina looked a little dubious when she saw it, and Keith observed with ready tact,—

"I am a very bad hand at finding my way, and I am sure you are not well enough to act as guide, so a cab is our best plan."

"An omnibus would have done as well."

Keith smiled.

"I don't like omnibusses, so please forget your prejudices in their favour and share my cab. I wonder if you know Camden-town very well, Miss Dawson?"

Nina wondered how he knew her name, and then guessed—which was the case—the mark on her handkerchief had betrayed it.

"I know it very well, indeed. I have lived there for more than ten years."

"Is it nice?"

Nina hesitated. Personally, she detested Camden-town; but she had been so eagerly warned always to praise it in the interests of the lodgings that she did not know what to say.

"Mamma likes it very much," she replied at last, hitting on an answer which combined sincerity and obedience; "she says it is so convenient."

"That is what people tell me. I am looking out for apartments, and I have been advised to go to Camden-town because it is cheap and convenient. But for the fog I should have started this morning."

A red spot came into Nina's cheeks. If only he had not looked so prosperous, there might have been a chance for her mother, but what young man with those clothes would care to inhabit Mrs. Dawson's ground floor? Still she might make the attempt; for the sake of all the children she must try, only somehow it was very difficult.

"Do you want very grand rooms?" she asked anxiously, "because mamma has some to let, and perhaps they might do till you could get better ones," she added hastily as an after-

thought reflecting that even a fortnight's rent would be a help.

Keith thought when he saw her anxiety that even if the rooms were the smallest and dirtiest he had ever seen, he must at least look at them rather than refuse. She looked a lady, but oh! how tremulously eager she seemed to find a lodger.

"I don't think I have very grand ideas, Miss Dawson," he said quietly. "I have lived with my uncle for a good many years, but he has gone to America, and so I am obliged to look out for a solitary abode. Perhaps you would introduce me to your mother, and see if we could come to an arrangement."

Nina's eyes brightened.

"We would do our best to make you comfortable," she said shyly. "The last people stayed with us two years; only the house is shabby; it mayn't be like what you've been accustomed to."

It struck Keith that no apartments in Camden-town would be like what he had been accustomed to at his uncle's mansion, but he was very much taken with the girl's sweet face, and he decided if her mother was anything like her he might be very well off at Stock's-terrace.

The cab stopped at the corner, the fog had cleared off by this time, and the Terrace was visible in all its gloomy respectability. Nina would gladly have hurried on so as to say a word in private to her mother, but she could hardly request her preserver to walk behind her, and so they reached the front door together. Keith gave a loud knock, and then retreated a step or two so that Nina might be in front when the door opened.

The opener was a little girl of ten with a pretty childish face, and a quantity of curly hair. Keith noticed the extreme tidiness of her dress, and decided her mother must be very neat. The small maiden did not even perceive him, but said eagerly to her sister,—

"Oh, Nina, where have you been? Mamma is so angry, she's been almost raving!"

Keith saw the distressed look on Nina's face, and stepping forward, took the reply upon himself.

"Your sister has been nearly killed, but she will tell you all about that. Do you think I could see Mrs. Dawson? I have called about the apartments."

Mrs. Dawson must have been somewhere within earshot, for she suddenly appeared, darted a withering glance at Nina, and then turned most affably to the stranger, inviting him to step into the parlour.

He had said to himself he would take the rooms if Mrs. Dawson was like Nina. There was not a shadow of resemblance between them, and yet after five minutes consultation he had agreed to become the tenant of Mrs. Dawson's ground floor at a weekly rental of five-and-twenty shillings—the odd five shillings being added to the sum usually demanded on account of his prosperous appearance.

He would take nothing but his breakfast and supper at home, and should be out all day.

He paid a month's rent in advance, and told his landlady he might stay a year or two if he were comfortable.

No wonder Mrs. Dawson bowed him out with a smiling face, and considered for once she was in luck's way.

But not a word of gratitude, not even a kindly "thank you" did she bestow on the little daughter who had gained for her this very desirable inmate.

When Mr. Rossiter had departed she went downstairs to the family sitting-room, which joined the kitchen, asked for and received the price of the necklace, and then said sharply,—

"Come, Nina, it's time you bestirred yourself, you can't sit there doing nothing, like a fine lady! Mr. Rossiter's coming to-morrow, and there's a heap to do before the rooms are ready for him to go into."

CHAPTER III.

It was November when Sir Gerald Anstruther started on his journey to America, and he had hoped to be home again with his destined heiress early in the next year; but February came and went without bringing news of the baronet's return.

He wrote to Keith very often pleasant rambling letters at first, telling all about his travels, but he never came on any clue to Mrs. Dugdale, and the kind-hearted, if irascible, old man grew sad and was fast coming to the conclusion that his search was in vain, and his old friend's child had gone over to the great majority.

"You will have your own yet," said Mr. Cameron to Keith, meeting the young barrister one bright March day just after he had received a more than usually hopeless letter from Sir Gerald. "It's easy to see Miss Dugdale is dead. Your uncle has been ready to keep his promise. He has behaved, indeed, most quixotically, but fate is too strong for him, and you will be master of Anstruther after all. By the way, where are you staying? Surely you are tired of Camden-town by this time?"

Keith answered rather shortly that he was still in the same lodgings, and then with a careless nod went off.

He never cared to face Mr. Cameron's questions, for the lawyer was as sharp as a needle, and might have guessed there was a private attraction which kept Keith faithful to Camden-town, for the months of his uncle's absence had been memorable ones to Mr. Rossiter.

He had been entrusted with a case of some difficulty, and won it. How it came about no one quite knew. He was the junior barrister in court, and as such was called on by the judge to defend a woman whose guilt seemed a foregone conclusion.

The poor creature had blue eyes not unlike Nina Dawson's, perhaps that accounted for it, but Keith pitied her, and threw himself into her case heart and soul. He got her off, and in the opinion of the legal world made his own fortune.

This much was certain, from that day briefs came in. Judges began to speak of Rossiter as "that very promising young man," and to bid their wives to send him cards for dinner parties and the like.

It was plain to all eyes but his own that Keith Rossiter had won fortune's smile, and that he would soon have a position men twice his age might envy.

And he stayed on at Stock's-terrace in the two small rooms on Mrs. Dawson's ground floor.

He put up with the service of the one maid of all work. He endured the constant prating of the next door neighbours, the poverty-stricken aspect of the house, just as though he had been used to such inconveniences all his life, winning golden opinions of his landlady, and making her the envy of all lodging house-keepers in the terrace, and yet no human creature in the neighbourhood suspected his secret, that he would have gone away long ago and taken a house of his own but for the magnet which had lured him to the terrace and kept him there—Nina Dawson's blue eyes.

His infatuation was the stranger because it had very little to feed upon. Nina was the prop of the house. She ruled the kitchen, did all the shopping, taught the children, and was general needlewoman to the family. Sometimes for days together Keith never even saw her, and Mrs. Dawson, who was so impressed with her lodger's perfection that she spared no pains for his comfort, would take messages or go errands into the parlours herself in Betsy's absence, so that Mr. Rossiter and Nina never met in the way of business.

They lived under the same roof. He was head over heels in love with her, and she admired him much as she admired the

knights and heroes in her little sisters' picture books, but time brought them no nearer each other.

Keith had come to Stock's-terrace on purpose to know Nina, and so after four months in her mother's house they were still strangers, and might have continued so but for something that happened early in those March days.

Mrs. Dawson was given to two holidays a year. Where she went no one knew, but regularly as March and September came round, she would go away, starting early one morning, and returning late the following evening. She never breathed a word as to her proceedings, never answered a question, but she never missed the half-yearly journey.

She had taken the last shilling in the house before now and left the family penniless, but she never failed to go. She always came back looking sad and tired. For days together after her return she would be given to irritability, and low spirits.

Not one of her daughters could solve the mystery, but Nina in her heart believed these half-yearly excursions were to her father's grave.

Mrs. Dawson started just as usual, leaving Nina with many injunctions to see after Mr. Rossitur's comfort, but she had not been gone an hour when the father of the little servant girl came round to say that his wife was dying, and Betsy must come home at once. To do the poor man justice he had some thought for Betsy's employers and volunteered to send an old woman round night and morning to do the rough work until Betsy returned.

Nina had no choice but to agree; if she had had the heart to refuse, Betsy could have solved the difficulty by taking French leave, and so it came about that when Mr. Rossitur's knock sounded, a whole hour earlier than usual, the children were out for a walk, and Nina was absolutely the only person in the house.

So they met face to face for the first time since he had lived in her mother's house. Keith and his princess never spoke to each other beyond the simple "Good-morning," which had been the extent of their intercourse.

He listened to the story of Betsy's absence with concealed satisfaction. He really could have blessed both her and Mrs. Dawson, since their being away gave him the luxury of this *little à-tête*.

"You will have to be hospitable and invite me to tea, Miss Dawson," he said, smiling. "You don't suppose I should let you carry that heavy tray upstairs? If you attempt such a thing I shall go out for the rest of the evening."

Nina hesitated and was lost. Keith came downstairs to the family sitting room, where their frugal meal was spread, and if it was a humbler repast than he had ever shared before, he seemed delighted at having gained his way.

"You've no idea how dreary it is always to have one's meals alone," he told Nina, as they waited for the home-coming of the children. "I often envy you when I hear you laughing."

Nina smiled.

"You see the children have such spirits; they will laugh, and now mamma is away I am afraid you will find them dreadfully noisy."

"I'll risk that."

He made himself so delightful throughout the repast that one of the twins was overheard wishing her mother would stay away a week and Mr. Rossitur come to tea every night.

They had no thought of secrecy, these little girls, and they talked to Keith as readily as he listened.

Nina, busy about the house, could not keep watch over their confidences, with the result that when the lodger went to bed that night he knew all about Mrs. Dawson's mysterious journey, and that Tom was at sea, but was coming home someday to make a home for

Nina. She was his favourite though mamma didn't care for her a bit.

Keith wondered if it was true or only childish exaggeration. The next morning Nina was amazed by a telegram from her mother saying that she was detained and could not be home that night. There was no mourning over the news.

Mrs. Dawson was a fond mother but not a loving one. The children infinitely preferred Nina's gentle rule to her mother's alternate storms of rage and tenderness.

It was Saturday, and Keith coming home early was met by the twins with the news. He then and there told the little girls he would take them to the Zoological Gardens.

He had made the offer to the children, and Nina's scruples were silenced by their tumultuous delight. In vain she protested it was too far, and there were so many of them.

Keith overruled all her objections, and ended by reappearing with a roomy waggonette, into which the whole party were comfortably packed.

His good nature was far less disinterested than the children believed. The two helpless ones had been left at home in the charwoman's care. The other four were quite old enough to require very little supervision.

Keith produced half-a-crown to be expended in rides on the elephant, and from that moment he and Nina were as much deserted as though they had come to the gardens alone.

"You really should not be so generous, Mr. Rossitur," said Nina, reprovingly, "you should think of yourself."

"I do," said Keith, emphatically. "I am enjoying myself enormously, Miss Dawson. You can't think the good it does me to hear a friendly voice again."

He heard plenty in London every day, but perhaps he forgot that. Nina was touched at once.

"You must miss your uncle very much. How is he getting on in America?"

To Nina it was a foregone conclusion that the old gentleman's voyage had been to seek his fortune. That he had sailed for the New World solely to find an heiress was quite beyond her suspicions.

Keith read her character aright. He felt there was nothing mercenary or scheming about her, and that all her sympathies would be with misfortune, and so he basely began to make use of this conviction, and trade upon her pity.

"No, poor old man. His last letters are most disconsolate. He has not made the least progress, and is nearly in despair."

"I wonder you let him go?"

"I couldn't prevent it."

Nina looked at him reprovingly.

"You can't be very poor," she said, gravely. "Surely by an effort you could have provided for your poor old uncle instead of letting him go out to America at his time of life."

Here was a complication. Keith did not relish being looked upon as a monster of selfishness, and yet from Nina's point of view he seemed one.

"My uncle is a wonderful man, Miss Dawson!" he said, almost solemnly. "When he has once set his heart upon a thing there is no turning him from it. I would share my last crust with him, but it wouldn't be necessary. While he was in England he had ample for all his wants, and the moment he comes back he can have his old position; but this trip to America was almost a craze to him. I think he would have broken his heart if he had not gone. I tell him whenever I write he'd better come home, but it's no use."

"It is very kind of his employers to keep his place open for him," said Nina, thoughtfully, "but he must be a very obstinate old man."

"He is; but he has the best heart in the world. When he comes back I should like you to know him."

Nina shook her head.

"I don't expect you will be in Stock's-terrace long."

"Why not?"

The girl hesitated.

"Because you will 'get on.' I thought when you first came you were far too grand for our poor little rooms, and soon you will think so, too."

"I don't feel 'grand!'" said Keith. "Of course I am 'getting on,' and I am glad of it; but that's no reason I should leave your mother's house."

Nina shook her head.

"But our lodgers always do leave when they get on. They did years ago when all the furniture was new, and now it is old and shabby."

"Your mother must have had a hard struggle since your father died."

"Yes; and it has changed her so. She was so bright and pretty before then, and he loved her so."

"Was it very sudden?"

"I don't know."

"You were too much of a child to remember?"

"I was twelve years old! They sent us away, me and Tom, and it was three months before we came home again; then—he was gone!"

"Poor child!"

"My mother never spoke of him. She never wore a widow's cap or got black frocks for us. Some people would have thought her unfeeling, perhaps, but I didn't. I seemed to know her heart was just broken."

"She had you left?"

"I think she just kept alive for the sake of the children, but she changed terribly. She had always been fond of me till then."

"And isn't she now?"

Nina raised her eyes to his face. They were full of tears.

"I ought not to tell you, Mr. Rossitur, but it has so puzzled me; and you, who are a man and know the world, might understand it, though I cannot. From the time we came home to find papa dead my mother has seemed almost to hate me."

"She couldn't," said Keith, impulsively.

"It is ten years ago now, and she has never changed. In all that time she has never given me one loving word. She has tried even to estrange the children from me."

Keith looked bewildered.

"Did Mr. Dawson die of any infectious disease?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"It would be glaringly unjust, of course, but if he died of any disorder caught from you it would a little explain her conduct."

Nina shook her head.

"I never had a day's illness in my life."

"Then it is an enigma to me. Have you no relations, no friends who could remonstrate with your mother?"

"I don't want any one to do that. No, we have no relations. We had one friend. She came to fetch us home when father died. Tom and I called her the 'kind old lady.' She was very pretty, and wore silks and velvets. I don't think mamma liked her, but she was very kind."

"A neighbour perhaps?"

"I don't know. She cried when she told us papa was dead. We had never seen her before. Then when she took us home she led me up to mamma and said I at least would be a comfort to her, but mamma pushed me away and took Tom's hand. It has been so ever since."

"And the kind old lady?"

"She furnished this house for us and brought us here. I think she paid my school bills and got Tom to a ship. She used to send us presents very often, but she never came to see us, and she has been dead now some time."

"What was her name?"

"I never heard."

"Your mother seems fond of secrecy?"

"Yes. I am twenty-two now, and I could understand her troubles if she would only trust me, but she always keeps me at arm's length. Sometimes I think I will go away

and seek my fortune, but the children could never spare me till Alice is grown up, and she is only twelve."

"They are all very fond of you?"

"Yes. It is strange, isn't it? Mother has done her best to prevent it, but they will cling to me."

"They are none of them like you. I suppose you take after your father?"

"Oh, no. Alice is the image of papa."

Alice had jet-black hair and large black eyes. A pretty child, but with a peculiar expression Keith did not quite like. Her eyes gleamed sometimes with almost a ferocious brightness. The best-hearted of children by nature, yet every one in the house feared Alice when her face took one particular look.

The rides on the elephant came to an end at last. Nina collected her flock and took them home. The charwoman had only prepared one tea, and Keith sat down with the Dawsons as a matter of course. He also dined with them the next day, and by the time his landlady came home he was quite intimate with the whole family.

Mrs. Dawson did not return till the Thursday, and then there was a white, set expression on her face which touched Keith's heart.

He did not like her. Indeed, there was something about her which repelled him strangely, but he felt sorry for her. He was certain she had known bitter sorrow, and that there was a secret in her life.

He found himself wondering very anxiously what the secret could be. Poor Keith occupied his thoughts a good deal with Mrs. Dawson's affairs, for those few days of intercourse had only strengthened his folly—it folly it was—and the young barrister, with wealth and fame before him, the man who might have aspired to a judge's daughter, had lost his heart once and for always to Nina Dawson, and had quite made up his mind to marry her or go a bachelor all his days.

He was very much in love. He thought Nina the sweetest, truest girl he had ever met, but yet he was not in the least blinded to the drawbacks of the connection. He felt there was something about Mrs. Dawson he could not fathom and should never like. He feared there was a dark secret in her past life, but for all that he never hesitated, if only he could win Nina's love he would marry her and treat her mother as his own.

He thought his difficulties lay with Nina. He believed a hundred or so a year paid to Mrs. Dawson would amply console her for the loss of the daughter she did not appreciate. That his landlady would be the person to raise objections to his suit never once occurred to him.

She had come back grave and more subdued than he had ever seen her. She seemed to take no interest whatever in anything around her, and to leave house and children entirely to Nina. The spring was coming on now, and the evenings were light and pleasant. Nina and her sisters began to take country walks (if the most rural outskirts of Camden town deserve that name) and it came about quite naturally that Keith met them and joined in the expeditions. Never a more honourable wooer than the young barrister. He never said a word on these occasions that the most vigorous of chaperons could have objected to. His one aim seemed to be Nina's enjoyment, and if he led her to look forward to his society with pleasure, to meet him gladly and to part from him with regret, who can blame him, since he was only waiting for the least hope of her consent to ask her to be his wife—gloomy mother, mysterious history, and friendless state, he was willing to overlook all these drawbacks if only Nina would accept his name.

It came at last, a lovely June evening, when he met Nina returning from some errand for her mother. For a wonder she was quite alone, not even the twins were with her. Keith felt his opportunity was come, and telling Nina he wanted her advice upon a very important subject, he persuaded her to leave the High-

street, with its din of omnibus and tramway, and go home with him through quiet side streets where they could talk as uninterruptedly as in a fashionable boudoir.

"You have heard from your uncle, and there is good news at last," said Nina, quickly. "I am quite sure of it, for I never saw you look so bright."

"I have not heard from my uncle, and my cheerfulness is selfish," said Keith. And he went on to tell her how his first book was accepted by a firm of eminent publishers on such liberal terms as he had never dared to hope for. Besides an intimation, they were disposed to consider anything else from his pen; he had a hundred a year of his own, and he was now justified in counting his professional income from all sources (he never said he was a barrister) at not less than five hundred a year. He was tired of being alone; he longed for a house of his own; did not Nina think his means were sufficient to warrant him in seeking one.

Nina smiled half sadly.

"Did I not tell you you would soon be leaving Stock's terrace?" she asked quietly.

"Yes; but I shall never leave it unless I take you with me, Nina, my love my darling. Don't you understand? I have learned to hold you dearer than aught else on earth? I have only kept silence hitherto because I so feared a rejection Nina, the home I want is one that you would share. Dear, won't you trust yourself to me and promise to be my wife?"

"Your wife!"

"Is it astonishing I should love you?" asked Keith, half impatiently. "Can I see you day after day and not long to call you my own, and do what heart and strength can to save you from trouble? Nina, you have not seen very much of me; but, my darling, you have seen enough to tell me if it is quite hopeless?"

Nina hesitated, and he went on.

"Dear, indeed you may trust my love. I am not far from thirty, and I never cared for any woman until I saw you. You are my first choice, and you will be my last."

The tears stood in her eyes.

"But you will be rich and great," she whispered. "You ought to marry some fine lady, and I am only Nina."

"I want only Nina," said Keith, passionately. "Dear, don't keep me in suspense. Tell me plainly, do you think you could ever learn to love me?"

"No," said Nina, quietly. "I could never learn that, because I love you now! I could not help it, you were so kind to me. From the first hour of our meeting you seemed to seek my happiness, and take care of me as no one had ever done before."

"Then you will make me happy, Nina? You will let me tell Mrs. Dawson you are going to be my wife?"

Nina started as one aroused from some happy dream.

She tried to take away the hand that rested on Keith's arm.

"How selfish I am! I forgot about the children. Mamma could never spare me."

"I have thought of that, dear. I grant we could not go away and be happy, leaving them uncared for; but I think, if we make up our minds, we can live very quietly ourselves, and then I might allow your mother a hundred a year or so to help her make both ends meet."

Nina shook her head.

"You ought not to take such a burden on you."

"Child, don't you understand? Nothing can be a burden to me so long as I have you. It is the thought of losing you would trouble me, all else I can bear. If I judge you rightly, dear, you won't mind beginning life rather humbly, so that we may try to make things smooth for those you leave."

"Keith, I think you are the most generous man I ever met!"

"May you ever think so, darling. And now, tell me, shall I speak to Mrs. Dawson to-night? Is she at home?"

"She is at home. Keith, I cannot tell what to make of mamma; she is stranger than ever since she was away that time in March."

"Be easy, Nina; I don't think Mrs. Dawson dislikes me personally. She has never known how to value you, and so I have less compunction in taking you away."

"But if she should refuse?"

"Then, Nina, I must—forgive my speaking plainly, dear—try to buy her consent. I believe she only values you because you are of use to her. If I enable her to employ a substitute to do the work those little hands have done so willingly, I think all will be right."

But Nina was trembling from head to foot.

"She is my own mother, Keith, but she does not love me. Don't think me mad, but I believe she will hate the idea of my being happy."

"Nina," said her lover, gravely, "I believe myself there is some secret in your mother's life. Let us look things bravely in the face together. Supposing Mrs. Dawson forbids our engagements, what shall we do?"

"I shall never forget you, Keith."

"That is not the point, dear. Your mother's opposition, if aroused, will spring from some secret cause neither of us can fathom, so we shall be powerless to remove it, dear. We cannot waste our whole lives for a caprice. You are twenty-two, if my persuasions cannot win a consent from your mother, will you dispense with it, and come to me without?"

"And leave them in poverty?"

"No. I promise you I would allow Mrs. Dawson the same amount as though she had acted the part of a kind, tender mother. My uncle is away, but I have an old, tried friend who would, I know, receive you until we could be married. Nina, it is your own fears that make me speak so plainly? I had never fancied Mrs. Dawson would be implacable, but you have made me strangely anxious, dear. Before we turn into the terrace, dear, promise me this, whatever happens, you will not take back your word? You are, you will be, my own plighted wife?"

And there in the sweet stillness of the June evening she promised him.

CHAPTER IV.

KEITH went in first. Nina had still her errand to accomplish, and perhaps both the lovers felt it better for Mrs. Dawson to hear of the engagement from her future son-in-law before she met them together.

Keith congratulated himself he was alone when his landlady herself opened the door. He was not a coward; he had faced many a danger in his youth, but he did shrink with a strange reluctance from his interview with Nina's mother.

"To speak to me," said Mrs. Dawson as she heard his request, and followed him into the parlour. "Of course you can, but I know pretty well what's coming. Mr. Rositur, you are going away?"

Poor Keith! How he got it out he never knew, but in a few words he told Mrs. Dawson of his hopes, and begged for her consent to his marrying her eldest daughter.

He said he was getting on, and likely before long to have ample means; even now he was able to make a comfortable home for Nina, and to—if she would allow it—help her mother.

Mrs. Dawson listened in perfect silence, her features never moved a muscle. She waited until he had quite finished, and then she said as quietly and composedly as though she had not been crushing his dearest hopes—

"I am very sorry to hear this, Mr. Rositur. You are a gentleman. You would have been a son-in-law after my own heart, but it is quite impossible!"

Keith persevered.

"I hope you may be persuaded to think

differently," he said, gravely. "Nina herself is willing to trust her happiness to me."

"I will never give my consent!" cried Mrs. Dawson, sharply. "If you were worth your weight in gold, sir, my answer would be the same!"

Keith felt indignant. He knew he was a far better match than she could have hoped for. He knew also that she only valued Nina for the sake of her usefulness.

"I think I have a right to demand your reason," he said, gravely. "I might remind you that, being of age, Nina can marry me without your consent, but I would far rather ask you in a friendly spirit, what is your objection to me?"

"I have none whatever. You have been the kindest, most considerate lodger I ever had, but I do not intend Nina to marry at all!"

"With her face I don't think you would have kept her free from lovers even if I had not found out her attractions. Mrs. Dawson, do be persuaded, give your consent to my marrying Nina, and let me do my best to help you with the other children."

Mrs. Dawson went to the door and shut it abruptly; she returned to her chair and looked searchingly into Rossiter's face.

"Can I trust you? If I tell you my reason will you promise me to keep it secret?"

Keith hesitated, he hated mystery.

"I may surely tell Nina? She would have as much right to know as I have."

"You may tell Nina. You can tell your own people if you choose, all I ask is that you will not let it get abroad here in Camden-town, that you will not let the shadow fall on my children's lives. It is for their sakes I have kept the secret, for their sakes I will spend my life in trying to keep it still."

Again she spoke of "her children" as though Nina were not one of them, but Rossiter never heeded this.

"I promise you faithfully, Mrs. Dawson, I will keep it from your younger daughters, and from any one who knows you."

"When you came here you thought I was a widow, did not you?"

"I think so still."

"I am a widow now," she said, slowly, "but when you came here I was a wife, a much-afflicted, heavily-troubled wife. For ten long years my husband has been lost to view; when I went away for that week in March, I was summoned to his death-bed. He died in the place he had been confined for ten long years—a lunatic asylum. Now do you understand?"

Keith staggered against the wall as one smitten by a sudden blow.

"You see," went on Mrs. Dawson, in a kinder tone, "why I can't let Nina marry you, why with my consent she shall never marry any one. Her father's curse is in her blood. The blow may fall on her at any moment!"

For two minutes there was silence, then Keith had nerved himself for the worst.

"Do you mean the disease is hereditary, in your husband's family?"

"I do. His mother and her mother before her died insane. He was the only child of a rich man's second marriage. His step-brother is now an officer of wealth and position, who would verify every word I say. He was furious at poor Charlie's marriage. He wanted him to be a bachelor, and so—as he put it—the curse die out."

"All through my married life the Dawsons took no notice of me, but when the blow came and—my husband had to be put away, I wrote to them, and his step sister came to see me."

"She was very kind, but I did not take to her. She furnished this house for me, and while she lived things were easier for us. She helped in many ways, but she would not persuade her brother, the head of the family, to acknowledge the children as his relations. She said it was best they should remain in obscurity, there was less chance of their marrying. She made a sailor of my boy,

thinking the freedom of the life his best chance of escape."

"Mr. Rossiter, some day you will bless me for my present refusal. Think what I have suffered with my husband, for ten years in an asylum, and a shadow only less than the stigma of crime ready to fall at any moment on my children's heads. Be thankful I have saved you from yourself."

She went slowly out of the room, and poor Keith sat down and tried to understand the calamity that had come to him, but the strangest part of it was that he did not believe it.

He had always thought there was a secret in Mrs. Dawson's life. He had always felt it concerned her husband. She had spoken to him eagerly, with tears in her eyes even, as she mentioned "Charlie's" fate, Nina's own confidences about her mother's half-yearly absences, about the "kind old lady," who came to them at the time of her father's loss, even the fact of her mother buying them no black frocks and herself wearing no widow's cap, all these things confirmed Mrs. Dawson's story, and yet he did not believe the reason she gave was her true one for parting him and Nina.

He did not like his landlady. He never had liked her, and he had no very high opinion of her sense of honour. She cared—he knew—nothing for Nina. Why should she care more for him? He had offered to allow her a hundred a year from his wedding day, and she had refused on "conscientious" scruples.

Mr. Rossiter did not believe one bit in these scruples. He began to wonder whether the wealthy brother-in-law she alluded to had offered her a handsome bribe to keep her girls unmarried, but dismissed the idea because they were all living in the greatest poverty when he first came to Stock's-terrace, which quite disproved it.

He sat thinking over his future till his very brain ached, and at last he decided two things. He would not believe Mrs. Dawson's story until it had been confirmed by some other person, and even then he would not give up Nina unless a high medical authority told him there was a danger of her inheriting her father's malady.

Keith had once thought of studying medicine instead of law, and he had picked up more than a smattering of the science.

He knew that little Alice Dawson possessed every sign of the constitution likely to develop the seeds of insanity. Already her fits of passion were terrible to witness. She was—Nina had said—her father's image, but Nina herself was quite a different type. The absolute quiet and repose of her disposition, her clear, thoughtful eyes, her patience and equable spirits and calm manner were all totally opposed to the signs of madness.

He remembered her innocent story of how the nameless friend whom Nina called the "kind old lady" had led the girl to her mother saying, "she at least will comfort you," and he built a theory for himself that Nina was far from the taint.

He knew in families afflicted with dementia there were often two or three sane members. He had heard of cases where the colour of the eyes or the shape of the forehead had been the sign of the children's future, and had even met mothers who had proved this among their own families.

Now Nina's eyes were blue—blue as the sapphire itself, and all her little sisters had black eyes with rather prominent pupils.

Only granted he was right—granted that Nina would be safe from the family scourge, why had her mother told him of it? Why had a nearly penniless woman at one stroke refused a husband for her daughter and a good addition to her income?

It bewildered him, and he longed for some other opinion on it, but who was he to ask. Mr. Cameron would have taken an adverse view to save his client at any cost from what he deemed a *mésalliance*, Uncle Gerald was far away, and though Keith had heaps of friends there was

not one intimate enough and trusted enough to be his confidante.

Keith's first act was to write to Nina. It was difficult enough to send his letter, but fortunately the little maid-servant was devoted to her young mistress, and though Mr. Rossiter hated such a means of communication, he saw no other way. So giving Betsy half-a-crown and his note he told her to give it to Nina when she was alone.

The household drudge earned her money, and Nina, who had wondered much at hearing nothing from her mother, guessed at once from the little missive that things were going wrong, for brief as it was it had not a hopeful ring.

"I must see you and alone. Will you meet me at Marble Arch at five o'clock to-night.—K. R."

Nina said nothing to her mother. Perhaps she felt it was a crisis in her life, and she must take her own way.

When Betsy put the tea on the table, and was sent to call the eldest Miss Dawson, she could not find her, and at that very moment Nina and her lover had seated themselves on a bench in Hyde Park, as far as possible from the fashionable crowd, and the girl, looking anxiously up into Keith's face, said, sadly,—

"I am sure you have seen mamma, and that she would not listen."

Keith felt more certain than ever there was something false about Mrs. Dawson's story as he glanced into Nina's beautiful eyes, his voice was very grave and thoughtful as he answered her.

"Your mother refused her consent absolutely. She said she would not let you marry me if I were worth my weight in gold. Nina, my darling, do not tremble so. I want you to be brave and hopeful for my sake."

"I can bear anything for you, Keith. Do you know I felt you had spoken to mamma. She has been so strange all day. She has hardly spoken at all, but has done nothing but write letters."

"I did not think she had a large correspondence?"

"She has not. Keith, do you think it was wrong of me? I could not help seeing the address of two of her letters. One was to Sir Edward Dawson. It did seem so odd. We are so poor and struggling I can't believe there is a baronet in our family."

It came on Keith like a revelation that he had a case now on hand in which his client was Sir Edward Dawson. Of course he had remarked the name was the same as his landlady's, but he had never given the coincidence a second thought.

Dawsons were nearly as common as Smiths. Now his heart gave a great bound. Sir Edward was a soldier of old family and large means, thus far answering exactly to the description given by his landlady of her husband's stepbrother.

Also he was a man of intense truthfulness and great generosity. Keith felt that however painful it might be to himself Sir Edward would answer his questions and answer them truly.

"Nina, I want you to think very carefully and try to tell me. Did the difference Mrs. Dawson has always made between you and the little ones exist in your father's lifetime?"

Nina looked puzzled. "Not so much," she said, slowly; "but I think mamma never loved me so much as the little ones. I was papa's favourite always."

"And where did you live first?"

Nina shook her head.

"I have no idea. I don't think it was in England, because I can just remember a big ship, and papa holding me up to see the sailors climb the rigging."

"What did your father do for a profession? Try and recollect what he was, Nina?"

But here Nina's memory failed. She could not tell. She was certain that they were better off—much better off. Sometimes money was plentiful, and her father would

bring home presents for them all. At others her mother would look troubled; he was very gay and cheerful, except sometimes he would get excited—just like Alice.

"Nina, do you think you are brave enough not to fret or be frightened if I tell you what your mother said was her objection to our marriage, dear? If you were different I should not dare to tell you, but I think there should be no secrets between us."

"I would rather know, Keith."

So he told her, softening, in his love, the news as much as possible, and Nina listened, her face growing sad and pale.

"It is very terrible," she said, slowly, "but Keith, I think it is true. It explains so much that has puzzled me, and of course mamma is right—we must part."

"Nina, I will never give you up unless it is proved to me beyond a doubt that there is a chance of your inheriting that fearful curse. I don't believe it. I think—Heaven forgive me if I wrong her—your mother has invented the excuse as a plea for parting us."

"She could not be so cruel."

Keith held the little hand tenderly in both of his.

"Nina, promise me you will be true to me. You won't let yourself be frightened into giving me up. I shall go to see Sir Edward Dawson; if he says your father really was insane you must still promise me to trust me. My uncle has a friend whose name is famous throughout the world as an authority on insanity. If Sir Edward confirms your mother's statement, will you let me tell our story to Dr. Laver and abide by his decision?"

"It seems wronging you, Keith."

"My darling, it would be wronging me to forsake me without cause. Nina, I do not want to blame your mother, but I can not feel that she is treating us fairly. I seem to know she has a secret reason for wishing to part us."

They sat on together a little longer, an agony in both their hearts. The world looked so fair on that bright summer evening if only they might go through life together. They loved each other deeply, devotedly, and yet it seemed well nigh certain they must part.

It was no idle fancy, no mere liking. Keith Rossiter had seen many a more beautiful woman, had known many far more fascinating, but he had kept heart whole in spite of all until he was made captive by one glance of Nina's blue eyes.

He had saved her life, remember, so he had some claim on her; then, too, he had seen her in her home; he knew her worth, knew that among all the troubles of poverty she was ever brave and patient.

He had gloried in his success only for her dear sake. He had been so glad to think he could find her a happy home, and even, so to say, buy her release from her sordid round of duties at Stock's-terrace.

There was no one to consult on his side. Sir Gerald Anstruther, if he could not succeed in his pet scheme by marrying his nephew to Geraldine Dugdale, would not mind in the least whom Keith chose.

Indeed there was enough romance left in the kind old man, in spite of his sixty years, for him to delight in a genuine love match.

And yet they must be parted. Nina felt a sad conviction her mother's tale was true. Keith fought against the instinct which told him it was probable. He believed if worst came to worst his friend, Dr. Laver, would declare Nina's future free from her father's doom, but he knew in his own heart that if this last hope failed he must give way.

He had seen something during his stay in Stock's-terrace of Alice Dawson's occasional fits of passion; not even to call Nina his own would he risk such an inheritance as he felt was hers for his future children.

So it was not to be wondered at that there was a sadness neither could shake off about the interview.

"Keith," said Nina, gently, "when do you suppose we shall know the truth?"

"I mean to go to Sir Edward to-morrow, dear. I do not believe he will refuse me any information in his power."

"And then?"

"If it be as I hope, I shall speak to your mother once again. Should she persist in her refusal, Nina, I think we had better be married at once. After telling such a cruel falsehood to try to part us she will deserve no consideration."

"But if it is true, Keith?"

"I shall go and talk to Laver, and then I must ask you to let me take you to him. You will not mind, Nina, he is such a kind old man—and it is for my sake."

She would not have minded anything for him.

"Keith," the girl said gravely, "if the worst happens, you will have to leave Stock's-terrace."

"Must I?"

"Yes," said Nina bravely. "If you have to forget me, you must go away; if Dr. Laver's opinion is against us, dear, you must never see my face again; it ought to be to you as though I were dead."

"I shall never forget you, Nina. I will go away, of course, if you insist upon it, but, my dear, it will be of no use. I shall love you and you only till I die."

"When is your uncle coming home?"

"How strange you should mention him. I had a letter from the dear old man this morning, and he says he is quite in despair of success in what he went out for. He will give one month more to the quest and then renounce the effort and come home. He may be with us by the end of July."

"I'm glad."

He looked at her lovingly.

"Child, do you think any kindred, any friends, can make up to me for losing you. My Nina, if I have to give you up, nothing else will matter to me."

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

SIR EDWARD DAWSON was just a little surprised when Mr. Rossiter's card was brought to him. He had seen his solicitors only that morning, and they had not given him any notice that the young barrister engaged in his forthcoming law suit would call upon him.

The Baronet had seen Keith Rossiter a week ago, and taken a great fancy to him. The business was one he had very much at heart, but hardly a case to excite much controversy. A farmer, who was one of Sir Edward's tenants, had built a chapel on his land, a hideous iron construction, which, being movable, he could take away with him when his lease expired, or set up bodily now at some other place.

Sir Edward contended his consent had never been applied to for its erection. He was a staunch churchman and hated the hideous building. Moreover, his dignity as a landlord was injured. Mr. Dobbs contended he could do as he liked, so long as he paid his rent. The chapel was used for revival services of a very peculiar character, being, in fact, a new departure altogether, and boasting a brass band and other attractions. The neighbours objected as much as their landlord, so Sir Edward could plead the depreciation of his property. Taken altogether, the cause was a very obstinate one, and there being plenty of money on both sides, it would probably be fought out to the bitter end. But still there was nothing in its nature to necessitate a call from Sir Edward's advocate at his private residence.

"Why, what's happened, Mr. Rossiter?" exclaimed the Baronet. "My man says you called this morning while I was out. Have you discovered any fresh evidence?"

"Sir Edward, I must plead selfishness in my errand. I have come to you on private business; but one so all important to myself

I venture to hope you will spare me a few minutes."

"My dear sir, I'll spare you the whole afternoon if you like. My time is not so valuable now I have retired from the service; but how I possibly can be of use to you I can't guess."

"You will pardon me if I intrude on any private grief," said Keith, simply; "but, indeed, I know of no one but yourself who could solve my doubts."

"Only say how I can help you," returned the Baronet, "and I will do my best, I promise you."

"Is it true, Sir Edward, that you had a half brother who died this year insane?"

Sir Edward started.

"Then that explains the extraordinary letter I received this morning! I cannot imagine your object in asking me the question, Mr. Rossiter; but I must confirm Mrs. Charles Dawson's story. Her husband was my half brother, and for the last ten years of his life he was in a lunatic asylum. Good gracious, what's the matter? It can't matter to you, surely?"

Keith Rossiter had grown white as marble. His hands trembled like a woman's. The kind-hearted Baronet was shocked.

"I would never have told you so hurriedly had I guessed you would feel it so much; but I can't for the life of me understand how poor Charles' fate can trouble you. You had better read his wife's—his widow's—letter. It came this morning."

It was very short and very simple, but its personal only strengthened Keith's prejudice against Mrs. Dawson.

"DEAR SIR,

"Although you have refused to have anything to do with me or mine, you will, I think, hardly refuse an act of justice. If applied to on the subject will you confirm my statement that I am the widow of your step-brother who died a lunatic.—Yours obediently,

"M. DAWSON."

"I don't understand," said Keith, slowly. "Why should she write like that? Your word is quite enough for me; but oh, Sir Edward, you have crushed my every hope."

"Do speak plainly!" said the Baronet, testily. "What can the fact of my half-brother's insanity have to do with you?"

"Only this," was the sad reply, "I am engaged to his daughter, and I shall love her all my life!"

Sir Edward looked at him sharply.

"She must be a mere child! Besides, I have heard—I think my sister who befriended the whole family told me—that the eldest girl was half-witted."

"That is Marion," returned Keith, quietly, "she is sixteen. My fiancée is the eldest of the whole family. She is turned twenty-two!"

Sir Edward looked bewildered.

"Are you sure?"

"I am positive. She was twelve years old—she tells me—when she lost her father."

"Then, Mr. Rossiter, she is not my step-brother's daughter, and therefore his sanity can matter nothing to you. At the time of his death poor Charles was under forty, and it is barely eighteen years since he made his disastrous marriage."

Keith stared at him in dumb surprise; but there was no mistaking the look of intense relief on his face.

"I will tell you the whole story," said Sir Edward, kindly, "and see if it explains things to you."

"In extreme old age my father married as his second wife a beautiful Spaniard. She died soon after the birth of her only child, but not before she had shown signs of insanity, and my father discovered the malady was hereditary in the family, for as long as people could trace back there had been at least one insane person in each generation."

"I can confess to you it was a fearful blow to my father's pride. By his will he left a

liberal provision for the son of his old age on the condition that he never married.

"We all loved Charles in spite of the doom that hung over him. He was, I think, the most fascinating creature I ever met. He was bred to no profession; but music was his hobby. He could always have made a living by his voice. He was, I think, eighteen, perhaps nineteen, when he went to Ireland on a long tour.

The months passed, and we all wondered why he lingered. At last the truth burst on us. Unknown to any of his friends, he had married a widow whom he met during his wanderings. With the cunning inherent in those subject to dementia, he had kept his secret hidden till he came of age, and it was too late to quash the marriage.

"He supported his wife out of the liberal allowance made him as a bachelor. The truth might never have been discovered, but my eldest brother—I was not Sir Edward then—grew alarmed at the lad's silence, and went to Killarney to hunt him up.

"Charles was then barely twenty-two. His wife was a very pretty woman, several years his senior, and there were already two or three children.

"I was abroad at the time, and did not gather all particulars, but I can prove to you that Charles was only thirty-eight this January, and that he lived entirely with his relations down to the period of his going to Ireland eighteen years ago.

"His eldest child, therefore, could not be much over seventeen. If I had been in England and the head of the family I should have acted differently. My brother Andrew was an intensely proud man; he refused to recognize the woman Charles had married, and acting on the power given him by our father's will, cut off his allowance."

"And then?"

"Then comes a gap in the history. I can tell you nothing more until ten years ago my sister, Miss Dawson, received an agonized letter from Mrs. Charles; the malady had declared itself! Her husband was hopelessly insane, what was she to do? Lucy was a good woman. She placed Charles in the asylum, and paid a yearly sum for his support. She helped his wife and children liberally.

"When I came home to England shortly before her death, I took, of course, the payment to the asylum on myself, but I have always shrunk from any communication with the wife and children.

"The latter I considered doomed creatures, and I could never forget that their mother had married a lad of nineteen without the consent of his family.

"She was a woman not far from thirty and a widow; she must have known there was something suspicious in the strangely hurried secret manner of her marriage, and I think myself she deserved all she got."

"And my Nina?"

"I should say she was the child of Mrs. Dawson's first marriage. Of course, I can give you no proof, but of one thing I am certain, she has no relationship whatever to our family.

"Understand me, Mr. Rossiter, I am not recommending you to marry her. Her father may have been a swindler or a thief for aught I know, but you may rest assured he was not my half brother."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Then you mean to go on with it?"

Keith's face lit up with a brilliant smile. "I would marry her to-morrow if I only could."

"I wonder why the mother tried to part you," said the baronet, reflectively. "You are a son-in-law she might well be proud of, and, poor woman, I should have thought with so many children to get rid of one would be a relief."

"It is insupportable. I offered to allow Mrs. Dawson a hundred a year to make up to her the loss of Nina's services, but she declared

she would not consent to the marriage if I were worth my weight in gold."

"Well, happily you won't need her consent since the young lady is over age, but remember, Mr. Rossiter, the world would tell you you are throwing yourself away."

Keith's answer was a sunny smile.

"When you have seen her, sir, you will understand."

"Perhaps you will let me have that pleasure after she is Mrs. Rossiter?"

And then they parted with a friendly hand shake, Keith carrying away with him a light heart.

It is astonishing how quickly things can be procured if only a person has plenty of money and a head on his shoulders.

Keith went straight from Sir Edward's to Doctor's Commons and got a marriage license, describing his bride as Nina, commonly called Nina Dawson, daughter of Mary Dawson, of Stock's terrace, Camden Town, and her first husband's name unknown.

Then he took a cab to a house agent's with such good results that before dark he was the accepted tenant of a very pretty little villa at Fulham, whose invalid mistress promised to vacate it in two days, leaving her eminently respectable servant to attend on the new inmates.

Keith had a debate with himself as to whether he should see Mrs. Dawson and boldly tell her he had discovered her treachery; but he decided against it. Fate was very kind to him that night. His landlady had gone round to the doctor's and Nina herself opened the door.

"Keith!"

"It is all right, my own," said the young man, cheerfully. "You are no daughter of poor Charles Dawson, but the only child of his wife's first marriage. Nina, I want to be married on Monday. I have got the license and everything. When once you are my wife we will see your mother together and ask why she tried so hard to part us."

The two lovers had no other chance of a word together. Betsy once again acted as Cupid's messenger, and carried a little note to Nina, which would not have enlightened Mrs. Dawson much if she had intercepted and read it, since it contained only two lines,—

"Monday at ten o'clock, round the corner."

The parish church was round the corner, and the appointment was for their wedding; but no third person who had read the little note would have guessed as much, though, happily, Betsy was faithful, and no eyes saw it but Nina's.

Keith received a telegram from Liverpool on the Saturday morning announcing his uncle's arrival. The baronet was going straight to Anstruther Park, but would be in London on the Monday, and hoped to call at his nephew's chambers, he had never had the address at Stock's terrace.

Keith decided to leave a line inviting him to come on to Fulham. It would be rather odd to receive visitors on his wedding-day, but he was anxious to introduce his bride to his uncle, and as to the proceedings being "strange," that adjective applied to every incident of his courtship.

It was a beautiful day; the summer sunshine lit up every corner of the handsome church. The clergyman had a rich musical voice, and read the service as impressively as though there had been a distinguished congregation. Keith had a thrill of surprise and of genuine pleasure when at the question, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" Sir Edward Dawson stepped forward and took the office on himself instead of leaving it to the solemn clerk.

It was over! They were married; the Baronet had wished them joy and departed. Keith and his wife walked slowly down the well-known street and turned into Stock's terrace.

"I feel so frightened," whispered Nina.

"You need not," said her husband, proudly. "No one can part us now; but would you

rather I went and braved your mother's anger alone?"

"No, we will go together."

Betsy received them with a broad grin. Betsy had very shrewd suspicions of what had occurred.

"Your ma's been calling you everywhere, Miss Nina," she said, cheerfully. "There's an old gent come that wants to see you. He's in Mr. Rossiter's parlour."

The bride and bridegroom went in together. There sat Mrs. Dawson in her best attire, and opposite her Sir Gerald Anstruther.

"This is Geraldine," began the widow in her blandest tones, but Keith interrupted her.

"Uncle Gerald, is it possible!"

"Keith, my boy, how on earth did you come here?"

"Why I live here, at least, I used to. Didn't you come here on purpose to see me?"

The explanation was very simple. Sir Gerald, feeling in despair of finding his old friend's child, had directed Mr. Cameron to advertise for the present address of Geraldine Dugdale. Mrs. Dawson saw the advertisement and answered it, believing fortune was coming to her all in a rush.

The cruel refusal to Keith's suit, the wicked deception she tried to practise on him arose from her fear of losing Sir Gerald's bounty.

He had never cared for her. His godchild married and gone, she would have had no claim upon him, and so she had tried to frighten Mr. Rossiter away.

Her own story was a sad one. She had returned a widow to Ireland—her native country—and married Charles Dawson in ignorance, she said, of the fate which threatened him.

From the very first he had shown such mad, unreasoning jealousy for her first husband, that she had dropped all allusion to her earlier marriage, and brought up Nina as his own child.

She had loved him, she confessed, far better than she had ever loved George Dugdale, and his children were dearer to her than those of poor George.

It had been a bitter trial to her all these years to know the doom which threatened them, while Nina's future was unclouded by any such dire inheritance.

Perhaps there was some excuse for her. She declared she would have given her consent to Nina's marriage with Keith thankfully but for the hope which had dawned on her of Sir Gerald's munificence, and her fear that Nina gone, he would do nothing for them.

Those who are happy can afford to be merciful, and Sir Gerald delighted that he could, with a clear conscience, leave his estate to his nephew, was not likely to be severe on Mrs. Dawson.

He settled three hundred a year on her by deed of gift, so that she no longer has occasion to let lodgings, and a great tide of prosperity has dawned for No. 47, Stock's terrace.

As for Nina (no one ever called her Geraldine), she was established as mistress of Anstruther Park, and became the sunshine of Sir Gerald's old age.

Her husband grew famous as a barrister, and wealth and honours came to him in his profession; but all those who know him best declare that he values no earthly gift in comparison with his wife's smile, and that he and Nina are just as assuredly in love with each other as years ago, when their attachment first began—a ground-floor romance in "MRS. DAWSON'S LODGINGS."

[THE END.]

It is said that only one woman with red hair in twenty in civilised countries exists, so it will be seen that they are really a rarity. Some set the number at far less. A Spaniard with red hair is very rare, but is considered a prize, and if it be a woman, she is considered a great beauty.

FACETIÆ.

THE World's Fair—The Goddess of Liberty.

AN electric spark—making love by telegraph.

WHAT is the most difficult train to catch? The 12.50, because it is "ten to one" if you catch it.

REV. PRIMROSE: "Do you know where you will go if you do these naughty things?" Little Johnnie: "Yes, sir—go to bed."

SHE says she is approaching her thirtieth year. Approaching it? Why, she has been getting away from it for the last ten years.

THERE is a sign on an undertaker's establishment which reads: "The wants of the deceased attended to at prices which defy competition."

"WHAT shall I call my play?" asked the man who had stolen one from the French; and his friend advised him to call it *Elijah*, because it was translated.

A WOMAN writes a column to a Boston paper on the subject, "How to Treat a Pretty Mouth." A man would have thoroughly exhausted the subject in two words.

"YOU say O'Hannagan leaves the Orphan's Home a large legacy?" "Bedad, it's purty large." "How much?" "Twelve children an' a goat, begorra!"

PERRIWINK: "Aw, Mr. Hardhead, is it true that cigarettes affect the brain?" Mr. Hardhead: "No. Those who have brains do not smoke cigarettes."

MRS. WIRY: "Drunk again! Oh, John, you promised me you would never let a glass touch your lips again." Mr. Wiry: "Right, M'riar. Wuzn't glass; wuzer bottle."

"HARRY, you ought not to throw away nice bread like that; you may want it some day." "Well, mother, should I stand any better chance of getting it then if I ate it now?"

WOULD DO AS WELL.—Timid youth: "I have a poem and I want to see the editor." Office boy: "The editor is busy. I'll do just as well. I'm on my way to the waste-basket now."

NO LONGER AFRAID OF HER.—Society belle (gloomily):—"I must be going off horribly in my looks. That is the second girl within a week who has asked me to stand as her bridesmaid."

COMPLIMENTARY.—Charlie (who has been blowing the cornet for an hour): "Say, Ned, do you think there is any music in me?" Ned: "I don't know. There ought to be. I didn't hear any come out."

MRS. FONDWIFE: "Yes, I have a secret for making my husband happy. I add something to his cares, and that diminishes them." Mrs. Giggle: "O do tell me what it is." Mrs. Fondwife: "I add an 's.'"

MR. FICKLEBY: "Do you know, Miss Dewitt, you looked charming at the ball the other night." Miss Dewitt: "Nonsense! I don't believe it." Mr. Fickleby: "Oh, but you did. Actually, I didn't recognise you at first."

"HAVE you any second-hand typewriters you'd like to sell?" asked the pedlar. "No," replied the merchant, "but I've one I'll give away." "What's wrong with it?" "Chews gum, and spells dozen 'uzz.'"

MINISTERIAL friend (on a visit): "I wonder what makes your mamma so happy to-day? She is singing around all over the house." Little Nell: "I des she's thought of somfin' to scold papa about when he comes home."

A WESTERN paper prints the following singular card of thanks: Mr. and Mrs. Heays hereby wish to express their thanks to the friends and neighbours who so kindly assisted at the burning of their house last Monday evening.

MAN of Family: "That burglar-alarm is a grand success; wouldn't part with it for a mint of money. It went off at one o'clock this morning." Dealer: "Eh? Did you catch a burglar trying to get in?" Man of Family: "No, but I caught my daughter's young man trying to get out."

"WHERE's the dictionary?" asked the new reporter. "We haven't any," replied a member of the staff. "Why, how do you manage to know when a word is spelt right?" "Each idiot asks the fellow who sits next to him."

WIFE: "Mr. Blower, you've always claimed to be a man of push, haven't you?" Husband: "That's what I claim to be, dearest; and I'm always ready to stand by that assertion." Wife: "Then just push this baby carriage a little, precious."

HE was the dunce of his class; that was what they said of him. But one day the teacher put this question to him, "How do you pronounce a-t-i-n-g-y?" "It depends a good deal on whether the word refers to a person or a bee," was the reply.

"YOU were doing some rather loud talking to-day, Jack." "Well, I only stated facts." "Glad to hear it. When you were saying that you feared nothing that walked, your wife was within ten feet of you." "Christopher Columbus! I hope she didn't hear me."

OMAHA PAPA: "Before I consent to you marrying my daughter I should like to know if you have staying qualities in business." Suitor: "Well I should say I have. I began at the bottom of the ladder several years ago and I've stayed right there to this day."

A MUSICIAN, brought to despair by the poor playing of a lady in a room above his own, meets her one day in the hall with her three-year-old child, and says, in a most friendly manner, "Your little one there plays quite well for her age! I hear her practise every day!"

BIGGS: "Did you notice, Driggs, what the Howler said of my last speech?" Driggs: "No; what was it?" Biggs: "Why, that in it I showed myself a Samson of debate." Driggs: "H-m-m, I see. Samson was the fellow who slew his enemies with the jawbone of an ass."

BOY: "Is the rooster speaking to the hen when he crows, papa?" Father: "I guess so." Boy (thoughtfully): "I wonder what he says." Father (who has several beds of onions, lettuce, carrots, radishes, and so forth planted): "I guess he says, 'Come into the garden, Maud.'"

"SO you expect to make the tower of Scotland, Mr. Sharpley?" "Yes, Mrs. Moneybags." "Well, I'd like to see them Highlanders myself in their national costume, but I should think when they dress up bare-kneed and the like in that cold climate they'd be half kilt." "They are, Mrs. Moneybags; I assure you they are."

APPLICANT: "Can't yer help an old soldier, mum?" Benevolent lady: "Poor fellow, here's a shilling for you. Were you wounded?" Applicant (pocketing the money): "No, mum; but I wuz 'mong th' missing, twice." Benevolent lady: "How terrible! When was it?" Applicant: Jest afore th' battles of Tel-el-Kebir an' Dongola, mum."

A YOUNG doctor, wishing to make a good impression upon a German farmer, mentioned the fact that he had received a double education, as it were. He had studied homoeopathy, and was also a graduate of a "regular" medical school. "Oh, dot was noding," said the farmer; "I had vonce a calf vot sucked two cows, and he made noding but a common schteer after all."

MRS. LATWEDDE: "What is this in this black bottle, mamma?" Mamma: "That? Oh, that's whisky. I got it to put on a sprain." Mrs. Latwedde: "Is that whisky? Why, it smells just exactly like the stuff the barber puts on Henry's moustache sometimes." Mamma: "Did you ever see him put it on?" Mrs. Latwedde: "N-o, but that's what Henry tells me."

THE late Rev. Dr. N. McL—, when minister of the parish of D—, was on one occasion marrying a couple at Smeaton Colliery. After the ceremony the rev. gentleman, in his usual jocular way, remarked: "My man! I've tied a knot w' my tongue ye cannot *lowee* w' yer teeth." "My conscience, no!" replied the young husband, "but, Maister McL— I can lowee 't w' my heels."

ADOBER: "Ob, how your words charm me! To think that you should daily discover more similarity between me and your sainted husband, May I ask how I resemble him?" Young widow (gravely): "You have all his bad habits."

"I DON'T think Jones has been indulging too much," said his kindly, believing spouse; "but still I thought it rather odd of him that he should wrench the knocker off the front door, and bring it up to me as I sat in bed, saying that he'd gathered another rose for me out of the garden, poor, dear, simple boy! He's just as loving and sentimental as ever he was."

"GEORGE, there is sadness and melancholy in your eyes to-night, and your cheeks seem blanched." "Yes, Maomi, I am far from being happy." Maomi: "Confide in me, dearest. Let me share your sorrow. Have the buffetings of this cruel world cast a gloom over your soul?" George: "Well, not exactly; but you see these shoes are new, and they pinch like thunder."

IN THE TRAIN.—"Georgie, Georgie! mind, your hat will be blown off if you lean so far out of the carriage." Paterfamilias (quickly snatching the hat from the head of refractory youngster and hiding it behind his back): "There, now, the hat has gone!" Georgie sets up a howl. After a while his father remarks: "Come, be quiet; if I whistle your hat will come back again." (Whistles and replaces hat on boy's head.) "There, it's back again, you see!" While the parents are engaged in conversation Georgie throws his hat out of the window, and says: "Pa, whistle again!"

CHARLOTTE, my dear, how is it I find you weeping? Have you had bad news from your husband?" "Oh! worse than that! Arthur writes me from Carlsbad that he would die with grief at being absent from me were it not that he gazes at my picture and covers it with a thousand kisses every day." "That is very nice of him; but surely you are not crying about that? Most women would give anything to have such a poetic and devoted husband." "O, yes! Arthur is very poetical. But you don't know. Just to try him, I put mother's photo into his travelling bag instead of my own, and the wretch has never found it out. Boo-hoo-hoo!"

AN English canon of note used to tell a good story of himself. In his capacity of magistrate he was once visiting the county jail, and expatiated to a friend who was with him on the virtues of the treadmill. Warming with his theme, he declared that he often wished he had one at home to give him the gentle exercise he required, but was too lazy to take, except under compulsion; and, to remove his friend's scepticism, he asked the warder to give him a turn. Round went the mill, the canon declaring that the movement was delightful, but after two minutes of it he had had quite enough, and called on the warder to stop the mill. To his horror the warder answered, "Very sorry, sir, I can't; it's timed to go fifteen minutes, and won't stop before."

AN amusing incident occurred in one of our Down-East churches a few months ago. The clergyman gave out the hymn—

"I love to steal awhile away
From every cumbering care,
And spend the hour of setting day
In humble, grateful prayer."

The regular chorister being absent, the duty devolved upon good old Deacon M., who commenced, "I love to steal," and then broke down. Raising his voice a little higher, he then sang, "I love to steal." As before, he concluded he had got the wrong pitch; and, deploring that he had not his "pitch-tuner," he determined to succeed, if he died in the attempt. By this time all the old ladies were tittering behind their fans, while the faces of the "young ones" were all in a broad grin. At length, after a desperate cough, he made a final demonstration, and roared out, "I love to steal." This effort was too much. Every one but the eccentric parson was laughing. He arose, and with the utmost coolness said, "Seeing our brother's propensities, let us pray." It is needless to say that but few of the congregation heard the prayer.

SOCIETY.

We are the only Christians in Europe who are not married in evening dress.

THE first house-party at Mar Lodge was a large one, and the youthful Duchess of Fife has already earned golden opinions as a hostess.

It is said that there are now orders ahead in the shops of Paris and London for all the golden hair that can be purchased in the next five years.

THE Queen and the Prince of Wales are very anxious to abolish the salaries of the political Lords-in-Waiting and of the great officers of State, who change with successive Governments.

THE simple, featureless life of Balmoral has already had a good effect upon the Queen's health, and Her Majesty is now sleeping well again and is free from the neuralgic troubles of the past few months.

FLAT back drapery has come in thoroughly at last, and very dowdy it looks till one gets accustomed to seeing everybody wearing it.

It is an open secret that the Queen intends to bequeath her estate at Osborne to Princess Beatrice, and Balmoral to the Duke of Connaught. Birkhall is to go to Princess Beatrice also, and Claremont to the Duchess of Albany, with reversion to her son.

THE Empress of Germany is to have a special bodyguard composed of twenty-four of the largest men in the Prussian army and commanded by an officer and two sergeants. They are to wear the uniform of Frederick the Great's bodyguards, which has been specially chosen by the Emperor himself.

THE Princess Victoria of Prussia, whose name was so closely associated with Prince Alexander of Battenberg some little time back, is going to settle in England. It is said that she has never really recovered from the blow caused by the Prince marrying the actress, Mdlle. Loisinger.

THE Queen, most excellent of mothers, owes more to her own than the world can ever know. The Duchess devoted her life to the training of her child for her brilliant destiny, telling her that she was anxious to bring her up as a good woman, as then she would also be a good queen. The wisdom of the Duchess of Kent's axiom has been fully proved by the Queen's long and wise reign.

MR. LANGTRY, the husband of the "Jersey Lily," is at present devoting himself to the joys of agriculture on the Isle of Anglesey, where he leads a bucolic life, far from fashionable society and the glare of the footlights, both of which he hates. He is a big, muscular, good-natured looking fellow of forty-two, though he looks younger; and, except for an occasional run over to Holyhead, seems quite contented with his pigs, his cows, and his sheep.

MR. EDISON, who, by the way, resolutely declines to be lured across the Channel—is reported to have recently given utterance in Paris to a most alarming, not to say appalling, prophecy. "In a few years," the great inventor is said to have declared, "the world will be just like one big ear; it will be unsafe to speak in a house until one has examined the walls and furniture for concealed phonographs." Should Mr. Edison's terrible prediction ever be realised, I am afraid that future generations will find little cause to bless his memory.

THERE is some talk that coming styles for children are inclining towards the Dutch modes of long ago, just like you see in pictures. The Fauntleroy business has been nearly done to death, and few boys if left to themselves, would choose to be tricked out in saashes and lace collars far too good to wear. The Dutch boys' trousers fasten at the knee; and there is rather a long waistcoat and a deep turned-over coat. The hat looks as though it came from Holland some hundred years since. The little girl's costume is rather grandmotherly to match, the skirt being longer than usual; and the waist is near the right place, instead of slopping down towards the knees as in recent ugly fashions.

STATISTICS.

THE Mint is capable of coining one million coins per week.

THE population of London increases at the rate of two hundred souls a day.

THE University of Oxford has appliances for printing in 150 different languages.

THE Bank of England, it is estimated, saves annually about £19,000 in notes which are lost, or destroyed by fire or water.

MAN has the power of imitating almost every motion but that of flight. To effect these he has, in maturity and health, sixty bones in his head, sixty in his thighs and legs, sixty-two in his arms and hands, and sixty-seven in his trunk. He has also 434 muscles. His heart makes sixty-four pulsations in a minute, and therefore 3,840 in an hour, 92,160 in a day. There are also three complete circulations of his blood in the short space of an hour.

GEMS.

HE who comes up to his own idea of greatness, must always have had a very low standard of it in his own mind.

THE thinking of a man out of right relations to God is not trustworthy—cannot be—nor on any themes which involve character.

MANY things rightly claim our attention; but none of them will receive it aright if our thoughts wander aimlessly from one to another without a guide.

FOR work to be the promoter of long and valuable life, we must know how to perform it and within what limits. Like everything else, we must use without abusing it.

TO meet with success something more than a small effort, or a series of small efforts, is necessary. It is not by short fitful jerks but by long vigorous pulls that a boat is forced against the current.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPONGE CAKE PUDDING.—Stir together till the palest straw colour, one and one-half cupfuls of powdered sugar, and the yolks of five eggs beaten. Then add lightly one and one-fourth cupfuls of flour, and the whites of five eggs beaten stiff. Bake and eat with wine sauce.

GINGER CAKES.—Mix well together $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of flour and 6oz. of butter, then add $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of moist sugar, one egg, a teaspoonful of ginger, and two tablespoonfuls of golden syrup; stir them all well together, and drop tablespoonfuls of the batter on the baking tin, and bake till done.

TEA CAKES.—Rub 3oz. of butter into $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of flour, warm half-a-pint of milk, add it to the paste; mix it well, then add a teaspoonful of vinegar, a little salt, sugar, and a teaspoonful of baking powder; divide it into small cakes and bake; when wanted, cut them in half and butter them.

AFTERNOON TEA CAKES.—Work 3oz. of butter into 7oz. of flour, add 3oz. of currants, 2oz. of castor sugar, one egg, and a little milk; stir it well, add a little more flour, and when it is all well mixed a teaspoonful of baking powder; divide it into little cakes, egg them over, and bake on a tin for about twelve minutes. These should be eaten as fresh as possible.

DROP CAKES.—Slightly melt 2oz. of butter; add 2oz. of sugar and 2oz. of flour, about a teaspoonful of apricot jam, half an egg, and a tablespoonful of cream; mix it all up well, and drop small quantities of the mixture on a baking tin; remove from the oven when they are a light brown. If liked, they can be rolled directly they are baked, while they are still soft. To keep them nice and crisp they should be put in a closely-shut tin.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN the Vosges Mountains the young women who dress the bride strive as to who shall stick the first pin in the marriage robe, as the successful one will be married the same year.

THE expressive word "booze" is derived from "bozo," an intoxicant made from millet seeds with some powerful astringents added, which is the favourite drink of the nomadic tribes of Tartary.

THE last child received at the Foundling Hospital under the "indiscriminate" system, when each morning brought its regiment of "infantry" to the gate, was appropriately named "Kitty Finis."

RUSSIA leather boots have been in vogue some time, and gloves to match are now gaining favour in Paris. They are rather thick, and smell just like the bags and purses which soon betray their presence in a room.

WHENEVER a woman begins to show curiosity about another woman's years, it is safe to assume that she has entered the era of comparing herself with others, and wonders whether she looks as old as this one or as young as that.

IT is not generally known that the custom of keeping birthdays is many thousand years old. It is recorded in Genesis xl. 20; "And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants."

A NEW fashion is reported from the Engadine—that of wearing little bells. Gentlemen have them fastened to their canes, ladies to their parasols, and English ladies in particular are said to delight in having them hung from different parts of their dress.

FOLLOWING close upon the discussion on the subject of female choristers comes the news that one of the daughters of Archdeacon Farrar has lately appeared as a preacher in a country district in the South of England, where she has delivered an address to a large congregation assembled in a barn.

IN visiting China you see men with their finger nails growing to the length of three or four inches. They are the scholars or mandarins, and the nails are worn so to distinguish them from common men or labourers. And if you should attempt to grasp them by the hand to shake it they would not respond, but simply clasp their own hands together and give you a "salam," or bow.

AMERICAN ladies, it appears, are much addicted to the habit of chewing caoutchouc—a practice which was common enough among boys and girls in this country thirty years ago. They pursue this habit in the street, in the theatre, and at home, the caoutchouc being specially prepared in small pieces about the size of a pill. No fewer than forty-two firms are engaged in the manufacture of these elastic balls.

IT is said that an archbishop invented the quaint headdress of the Sisters of Mercy as follows:—He was refreshing himself at a convent, and at the close of his repast, a sister knelt before him, offering a towel and a basin of water wherewith to rinse his hands, and when he had washed and dried his fingers, he playfully arranged the said towel into something like the celebrated shape, and said, "Wear that," placing it on the kneeling sister's head. The headgear thus evolved is worn to this day.

THE house-to-house comfort development is on the increase, and I believe in course of time that we are even to have our meals cooked on this plan, and thus be saved all the worries of cooks, kitchenmaids, and coals. The latest idea in this direction which will shortly be put into operation is a house-to-house warming system. By means of connected pipes, on the plan of the electric lighting, hot water will be run through the houses, which will thus be warmed as they are in America, but absolutely without trouble to the tenant. Safety valves for superfluous steam will, of course, be fixed, and it is thought that sufficient boiling water will always thus be able to be supplied to heat ovens and provide a constant supply of hot water to each dwelling.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

BARBY.—Certainly not.

HARRY L.—The letter will be about six weeks on the road.

AN OLD READER.—Your only plan is to take out a quinquina.

PERELLA.—You do not require a passport for France or Germany.

VERAS.—No duty is charged on electro-plate coming into England.

DELIA.—You will find the poem in almost any book of recitations.

WILTSHIRE LAD.—The name of the town of Derby is pronounced as it is spelt.

T. B.—The grand jury at an assize is composed of magistrates for the county.

SALLY.—An illegitimate child has no right to any name but that of its mother.

N. N. Y.—A farmer requires a gun-license to shoot rabbits, even on his own land.

F.—Over fourteen and a half million people have visited the French Exhibition.

POOR MOTHER.—A boy of twelve who has passed the fifth standard may leave school.

TROT.—Oxide of zinc frequently forms the basis of toilet powders, and is quite harmless.

EFFIE.—If you entrust us with your portrait for inspection it will be carefully returned at once.

ELMSIE.—The dealer is not obliged to take the instrument back, but can hold you to your bargain.

HARRY.—1. Faust is pronounced as if spelt "Fowst." 2. The Corn Laws were repealed on June 26, 1846.

UNHAPPY PREMIER.—No one can settle your quarrel for you; it appears to be entirely a family matter.

BROTHER-IN-LAW.—You must get the advice of a solicitor; we never attempt to give legal opinions.

BARBROOK.—The lines are not quite suitable for our columns; they are therefore declined with thanks.

SORROWFUL PAUL.—A daughter comes of age, and is free from the control of her parents, at twenty-one.

JAMES H.—The receipt you inquire for is a trade matter; you must apply to some one in the business.

T. A.—Technically, the power of pardoning prisoners rests with the Queen, but actually with her Ministers.

DICK'S DARLING.—It is not fashionable to do either; but if either, the lady would take the gentleman's arm.

VISITOR.—The Paris Exhibition is being held expressly to commemorate the centenary of the French Revolution.

F. J.—Yes; any person not interested in the will is a good witness, no matter how near a relative he is of the testator.

ARTICLED LAD.—If there was anything said about remuneration in your articles of course you can claim it.

PEACH BLOSSOM.—1. The writing seems to be that of a child. 2. We have no experience of the article in question.

WORKMAN.—The British gold coinage is of 22 carats pure gold and 2 carats copper; the latter being used to give the requisite hardness.

A. J. C.—We hardly understand what you mean by "solution"; there are many paints and pigments which will exactly produce the colour.

BOR.—Tobacco may be grown and manufactured in England under license from the Excise, and payment of the duty on the produce manufactured.

X. Y. Z.—You are altogether mistaken in the rate of interest. You can purchase a Government annuity and obtain all information at any post-office.

ST. CLAIR OF THE ISLES.—You had better put the matter into the hands of a respectable solicitor if you cannot come to London to see about it yourself.

C. S.—1. Domestic servants must give a month's notice to leave. 2. Farm tenants may kill ground game (hares and rabbits) on their own land, but not winged game.

WILLIE.—The broad arrow mark used by the Government on stores and materials is said to have been the crest of the Earl of Romney, Master-General of Ordnance, 1693 to 1702.

P. P. P.—He would not have to stamp his "bills," if by "bills" you mean his particulars of account, but of course his receipts for £2 and upwards should bear a penny stamp.

TROT.—It is always "up to London" and "down from London," but where the metropolis is not in question people go "up" when they go north and "down" when they go south.

PUEZLED JACK.—The coins used are German. A crown of ten reichsmarks is equivalent to 9s. 9d. English money; one reichsmark of one hundred pfennige equals 10s. 6d.

INDIGNANT.—We know of no means by which you can compel a son seventeen years of age to return home. You are certainly not entitled to seize his wages, but you are in no way liable for his debts.

MARY.—We sympathise with you in your trouble. We should say the first payment is due on the date named. If he does not pay have him summoned for default and the judge will deal with him.

NINA.—It must very much depend upon how the only child is brought up. It is not for the mother to make, as some only children are, and there is money, we should say it would be regarded as fortunate.

ANXIOUS AMY.—You are in a sad position, but so are hundreds of other women all innocent of any wrong doing on their own part. You cannot marry again till you have actual proof of your husband's death.

TERENCE BLAKE.—1. A special license costs about thirty pounds, and is obtainable from the Archbishop of Canterbury. 2. Albert, from the Saxon, means all bright. 3. The property would go to the next-of-kin.

ETIQUETTE.—1. It is the place of the hostess to suggest retiring for the night. It is not for the waiter to make the first move. 2. A young lady does not tip the men servants unless they have rendered her an out-of-the-way service.

E. MARTIN.—A publican can refuse to serve any one who has already had too much to drink, or is behaving in any objectionable way. No one would refuse to supply a well conducted person with what he or she wanted during open hours.

ANTHIE.—1. You had better take your coins to a dealer in curios and antiques; coins of the reign you mention are not specially valuable. 2. Hannah is a fine old Hebrew name and signifies Grace. 3. The writing is careless, but a good hand.

NELLIE.—The longest period of mourning for an uncle is three months, the shortest six weeks. If you adopt the former period, you should wear black without crape for two months and half-mourning one month. If the latter, black without crape for six weeks.

EXPECTATION.

Dear heart, the night were long
Did not thy memory
Come like a song—
A song of joy to me,
With hope and cheer from thee,
Dear heart, to me!

Thou art with me to-night
And I am, love, with thee!
The vision's bright,
And shows, sweetheart, to me
How I am knit to thee,
And thou to me!

Why should the night be long
While I can think of thee,
And hear thy song
Swail sweetly o'er the sea,
Fraught with a love from thee—
Thy love for me!

So, as I see the moon
Slip down behind the sea,
I know that soon
The sun will rise for me,
And with it come from thee
Sweet words for me!

B. W.

DORIS.—A wife living apart from her husband, for sufficient grounds, cannot claim the custody of a child of eight years old, unless by order of a superior Court (Chancery or Divorce), to which it must be shown that the husband is an unfit person to be entrusted with the child.

DORIS.—1. It was very improper; a girl ought never to speak to a strange person without an introduction. 2. Yes, it was wrong. A girl should be more careful. The lower classes dispense with introductions, but not people in our class of life. 3. He would think it improper, and it would be so. A girl should not let her love lead her too far.

LOVE AND DOUBT.—We do not see how a man could love a woman, or a woman love a man, without confidence in the loved one—without a thorough belief that he or she is unquestionably truthful and faithful. If a man fancies every time a girl to whom he is engaged does something which he does not understand, that she intended something wrong, he does not truly love her.

PRETTY CORA.—1. Try sweet oil and brandy to darken the hair. 2. The best cosmetic is pure water, but many persons use glycerine diluted with fresh lemon-juice to whiten and soften the skin. Used in moderation it is harmless. 3. No personal knowledge of the lotion named. 4. A piece of cut lemon bound round the toe will soften the corn on it and enable you to get rid of it with a pair of scissors.

BRIDE ELECT.—The bride goes up to the church on her father's right arm, the bridesmaids following two by two; her mother and sisters precede her to the church; the former generally remains with the bridesmaids (just inside the doorway) until the arrival of the bride. If there is an odd number of bridesmaids one may walk first or last, as you prefer, but the latter plan is the more usual. The head bridesmaid walks immediately behind the bride. The bridegroom's relatives should place themselves at the left hand side of the church, the bride's relatives on the right. The bride stands at the bridegroom's left hand and comes down the church on his left arm.

H. B. (Aberdeen).—1. The husband usually takes the wife's wedding ring after her death; if he does not keep it, it is for him to choose what shall be done with it. 2. The title is not hereditary; the gentleman is only a knight, and his wife has no real claim to the title of lady; it is only hers by courtesy. 3. The 11th of June, 1871, was on Wednesday. 4. The writing is exceedingly clear and good.

J. LEON.—1. The famous Spanish Armada was refitted in the Bay of Gijón, Spain, in June, 1588, before setting sail for England. 2. On Jan. 16, 1809, a British force under Sir John Moore, after repulsing the French troops commanded by Marshal Soult, succeeded in evacuating there, but Moore was killed. The city surrendered to Soult three days later. 3. The sea wall at Gijón was completed in 1870.

CONSTANT READER.—The best time to bathe is just before going to bed, as any danger of catching cold is thus avoided, and the complexion is improved by keeping warm for several hours after leaving the bath. A couple of pounds of bran put into a thin bag and then in the bathtub is excellent for softening the skin. It should be left to soak in a small quantity of water several hours before being used.

BARBARA.—1. The coronet of the Prince of Wales of England was formerly a circle of gold, with four crosses patee on the edge between as many fleurs de lis; but since the Restoration it has been closed with one arch, adorned with pearls, and surmounted by a mound and cross. 2. In England coronets are worn at the time of a coronation by peers and peeresses. They surround a coronation by peers and peeresses. They surround a cape of crimson velvet edged with ermine.

TROUBLED.—A bad breath is certainly repulsive, and very properly so, not only because it is unpleasant in itself, but because it can always be remedied with proper care. If it proceeds from decayed teeth, a dentist should be consulted; if from a disordered stomach, it is a case for the physician. Two drachms of chlorine of potash mixed with six ounces of rose water will make a purifying wash to rinse the mouth with every few hours.

H. B.—The whole discussion as to the relative superiority or inferiority of "Man" or "Woman" is utterly idle and stupid. There is no superiority or inferiority in the case. Man and woman are perfect and complete equals. They exactly balance and supplement one another. Each is necessary to the other's existence, happiness, and well-being. Neither could carry on the world without the other. One is just as great as the other; and just as little; just as wise and just as foolish; just as mean and just as magnanimous.

WORRIED DICK.—Sit erect in your chair when reading, and never attempt to read by a flickering light. No one should read in bed or in a railway carriage. When you come to an age that suggests the wearing of spectacles, let no false modesty prevent you from getting a pair. If you have only one eye, an eyeglass will do; otherwise it is folly. Go to the wisest and best optician you know of, and state your wants and your case plainly, and be assured you will be properly fitted. Remember that bad spectacles are most injurious to the eyes, and that good and well-chosen ones are a decided luxury.

D. D.—An amusing test of the difference of disposition in barn-yard fowls may be made by placing a piece of looking-glass against the trunk of a large tree and laying a train of corn in front of it. Some hens will discover what they all take to be a new arrival with mild curiosity, and merely look at it intently, peering round behind the tree, and then walk quietly off. Others peck the glass angrily and insist upon fighting, while a few nervous females show much of the same noisy excitement that seizes upon most of the hens when they spy a snake. We tried the valiant old autocat of the farmyard with this trick, and he at once became furious and showed fight.

FORSAKEN WIFE.—Do you not think that your troubles are somewhat of your own making? Many wives fall into the error of being all mother and no wife as soon as there is a baby to claim their attention. Your husband very naturally objects to being entirely uprooted by the new arrival; he looks for a little comfort when he returns home, wearied and worried from the day's duties, and his wife should keep the baby and its belongings a little in the background during the only hours that her husband can devote to his home. A man very naturally goes out for amusement and recreation when it is impossible to find it at home, and it is impossible with a baby so terribly in evidence as yours appears to be from your letter. Your first duty is to the man who finds and keeps your home, however fond you may be of your child. He will not love it half so dearly if it is always put between him and his comforts.

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